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THE REFORMERS AND HOLY SCRIPTURE

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THE REFORMERS
AND
HOLY SCRIPTURE

A Historical Investigation

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FOREWORD

"The Reformation is the hinge on which all modern History turns," so said Froude, and the statement is a mere truism pointing to the fact that the modern world is built upon the work of the Reformation. When one examines the real basis of the Reformation one finds that ultimately it resolves itself into the substitution of one kind of religious authority for another. As Dr. Bartlet and Dr. Carlyle stated very truly in their book on "Christianity in History," p. 528, "the great movement of the sixteenth century was not a revolt against the religious principles of historical Christianity, or even against the mediæval conception of it as a whole, but rather against the organised system of authority which had for so long controlled man's relations with God." In pre-Reformation days man's relation with God was not a matter for himself alone, his freedom in spiritual matters was restricted by the Church which in and through her priests, effectively controlled his spiritual desires in this world, and professed to control them also in the next. From the authority of the Church there was no appeal.

A reaction against this restrictive tendency was already apparent in the fifteenth century through the liberalising influence of the leaders of the Renaissance, but this movement only showed itself in a destructive negative criticism or, in a few instances, in the substitution of the authority of the intellect for the authority of the Church. In neither case however was the purity of religion or the freedom of religion much advanced.

The long desired movement towards the restoration of primitive Christianity came with the Reformation, and the driving force of the Reformation was the fact that men like Luther appealed to the Bible as the source of religious authority.

Here was the touchstone by which all spiritual matters were decided, here was a standard of authority very different to the ecclesiastical standards of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. With the Bible in his hand the simplest reader was on a level with Pope, or Bishop, or Priest, and the contrast between the truths contained in the Bible and the teaching of the Church made the Reformation inevitable.

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In general terms therefore it is true to say that the religious authority of pre-Reformation days was the Church, whilst the religious authority of the leaders of the Reformation and of their successors has been the Bible. Needless to state the authority of the Bible as the sole rule of Faith has always been challenged by the Roman Catholic Church, which puts the claims of the Church and of Tradition on a higher level than that of the Bible. From the very nature of the case this was to be expected from a Church which cast out the Reformers. The challenge to the authority of the Bible has in recent days come also from other quarters. During the last 60 years or so there has been a vast accumulation of knowledge both in literary and in scientific circles which has caused men to challenge many hitherto accepted standards. We are all acutely conscious of this challenging spirit in our social and constitutional life, just as we have been reminded of it also in the papers recently read at the British Association. It was inevitable that the spiritual standard of Protestant Christianity would not remain unchallenged, for it seems unquestionable that all hitherto accepted standards shall pass through the crucible of criticism.

In view of these circumstances it is wise for Protestants to examine the attitude of the leaders of the Reformation to the Bible. Since the modern world is built upon the work of the Reformation, it is incumbent upon us to see how the Reformers treated the Bible, and afterwards to ask ourselves whether men like Luther or Calvin would have held different views about it had they lived to-day. Those who will study what Dr. Sydney Carter has written in the following pages will see something of the way in which the Bible was regarded by those who recovered for the world the lost simplicity of the Gospel. In one sense there was not an absolute uniformity of interpretation for there was no repression of individuality, and the Reformation was above all due to the open Bible, read by the individual and interpreted to him by the Holy Spirit. There might be even differences on the part of the Reformers in the valuation of certain of the books of the Old and New Testaments, and there might be criticisms of certain points of historical accuracy. But whilst this may be so, there was an unhesitating belief that the Bible was the Word of God ; there was the firm conviction that it contained the Revelation of God's will to men, and that it spoke as the voice of God to the souls of men, and they held this belief because the Bible brought Christ before the mind and conscience of men.

The Reformers stressed the Bible only as an agent, not as an end in itself, and the importance of the Bible to them was

that it did give a clear account of God's dealings with them, and that it gives in unmistakeable language God's revelation of Himself. The Bible was not regarded by the Reformers in the light in which Mahommedans have regarded the Koran, for the religion of the Reformers was not a "book religion." The supreme value of the Bible to them was that in it they saw "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." They knew that it was the revelation of Christ which speaks direct to the heart of man from the pages of the Bible, and by experience they realised that it was the illumination by the Holy Spirit which enabled man to be brought into intimate and living relationship with his Redeemer.

Such was the great work of the Reformers, a work which will never be out of date while man needs a Redeemer. It is because Dr. Sydney Carter brings home to us something of what we owe to the Reformers in their great stress upon the value of the Bible, that I heartily commend his thoughtful work.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

The following pages are an attempt to give a brief conspectus of the opinions of the most prominent Anglican and foreign Reformers on the question of the Holy Scriptures. The subject is of course a vast one, and were it to be treated adequately these pages could be almost indefinitely expanded. Want of time and pressure of work have, however, compelled me to compress my researches into quite popular dimensions, but I trust I have dealt with the different aspects of the inquiry sufficiently comprehensively to enable the ordinary intelligent reader, from reliable historical evidence, to form a clear and accurate view of the attitude adopted by the outstanding leaders of the Reformation period towards this supremely important question.

Although I have not refrained occasionally from expressing my own convictions, I have endeavoured not to obtrude them unduly, since my main aim has been to present a short, concise historical investigation, so that it may be easily apparent how far the varying modern schools of Christian thinkers and scholars have travelled since the days of the Reformation, from the general views held on Holy Scripture at that most important epoch.

I am much indebted to my friend, the Rev. Dr. T. W. Gilbert, the Principal of St. John's Hall, Highbury, for his valuable and discerning introductory Foreword.

My thanks are also due to my brother, the Rev. G. Foster Carter, M.A., Vicar of St. John's, Boscombe, and to my friend, the Rev. D. H. C. Bartlett, M.A., Hon. Secretary of the B.C.M.S., for their kindness in reading through my manuscript and offering minor but valuable suggestions and criticisms. I am also most grateful to the latter for his very generous and helpful "Appreciation."

I should like to add a note of real gratitude to my friend, the Rev. T. Allison, M.A., for his care and labour in reading through the proofs.

Clifton,
February, 1928.

AN APPRECIATION

That a NEW SPIRIT, uplifting the character, imparting release from powerless formalism, and calling man to the realisation of his nature, operated at the time of the Reformation cannot be denied. That it appealed to the learned and un-lettered, and awoke in the degraded the very image of God, is beyond question.

That the Leaders of this upward movement must have found a source of inspiration, replete with the power which resides in Truth, is psychologically certain. If it can be shown that the spiritual triumphs of the Reformation were the fruit of faith in the Scriptural Revelation of God, then, since a tree is known by its fruit, there is demonstrated the truth of God's word written.

The attitude of the Son of God incarnate, to a written revelation of the Deity, has long since been demonstrated, and His habit of substantiating His claims and mission by reference to the "Scriptures" has been impressed by many a writer.

In the following work Dr. Carter applies an investigation of the writings of the Reformers for a similar purpose, and he leaves his readers fully convinced that the ground of their action and the inspiration of their teaching was none other than the same Scripture.

To-day Organised Christianity seems to be oblivious to the fact that there is nothing to indicate the possibility of a continuance of a REASONABLE service of the Eternal God, apart from the acceptance of the Scriptural revelation of Him. If Dr. Carter's calm and critical investigation of the Reformers' attitude towards Scripture impresses the fact that the intellectual and spiritual light diffused at the Reformation was dependent upon the Word of God written, then perhaps the contemptuous sneer which is hidden beneath the term—"a book religion"—will be seen to be born of ignorance. An ignorance especially of the history of Religion, which has ever deteriorated into superstition when left dependent upon oral teaching or upon an uncertain Church authority.

In demonstrating the source of the Reformers' power and wisdom, Dr. Carter indirectly, but none the less effectually,

calls to renewed faith in that reliable Armoury which has afforded weapons capable of worsting the world, the flesh and the devil. This is a signal service for it is directed to a Church which, while remaining nominally Scriptural, is largely impotent to-day because critical of, rather than trustful in, the Written Word of God.

DANIEL H. C. BARTLETT.

February, 1928.

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INTRODUCTION.

The question of the Inspiration, Sufficiency, Authority and Interpretation of Holy Scripture has almost from the first been a cause of dispute, division and controversy amongst Christian people. But probably it was never more so than to-day. Even confining our attention to the Anglican Church we find that there are at present two fairly decided cross divisions. There are, for instance, those who uphold the sufficiency of Scripture and those who wish to add to it ecclesiastical tradition in some form. There are also those who uphold and those who deny its full inspiration. The methods of its interpretation are yet more diverse, while it is still a disputed question whether the individual Christian has the sole right of private judgment or interpretation of the Scriptures, or whether he should submit that judgment to the guidance of the Church speaking through the voice of its official ministers.

A very great change on all these questions was effected at the period called the Reformation, a movement which a recent Archbishop of Canterbury declared, restored the Church "to its primitive character, and was the greatest epoch in Church history since the days of the Apostles," and as far as the Church of England was concerned was "conducted by persons of the very highest capacity and the very largest knowledge."[1]

Both the Renaissance and Reformation periods were times of keen intellectual thought and of unfettered criticism. After the authority of the Pope had been repudiated, this keen spirit of inquiry and investigation of all accepted and traditional beliefs and practices was unchecked. The great aim of the religious Reformers was to rediscover the pure and primitive teaching of the New Testament times, and the result of their inquiry on this subject soon convinced them that the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, had been regarded in Apostolic and primitive times as fully inspired by the Holy Spirit both as to their facts and doctrines, and also had been accepted as the sole rule of faith and conduct.

With this sincere aim to restore primitive Catholic teaching it cannot be without interest or importance to endeavour to discover from contemporary and original sources the exact attitude towards Holy Scripture which was taken by the great Reformation leaders, both Anglican and Continental.

[1] "Life of Archbishop Benson" 2. 682.

CHAPTER I.

Inspiration.

Let us begin our inquiry with the difficult, highly contentious, but all important question of Inspiration. How did the Reformers regard this subject?

Its Meaning and Nature.

A word or two is necessary by way of introduction on the meaning of the term itself. The word inspiration in its adjectival form Θεόπνευστος (God breathed), is only found once in the Scriptures (2 Tim. iii. 16), and it is a word which is employed now in at least two different senses. We use it for instance of any one possessing special genius in any particular branch of knowledge, by declaring that he is inspired. But the inspiration of Scripture goes further than this and implies an extraordinary supernatural revelation from God. So that the inspiration of the Bible means more than the mere impartation of knowledge to the ordinary individual, and more also than the ordinary working of God's Holy Spirit on the heart in response to prayer. It stands rather for the communication of divine Truth to the authors of the books of Holy Scripture in such a way that they were able to write under the special guidance and influence of the Holy Spirit. It was a unique inspiration different both in degree and kind from the normal influence of the Holy Spirit. This unique inspiration of the Scriptures has been universally held in the Christian Church from the earliest times. Though at first the oral gospel was treasured more than the written, as those "who had companied with" Christ died off, the written was seen to be more reliable, and these γράμματα were soon regarded as equal in authority to the Old Testament Scriptures. St. Paul's writings were definitely classed with the "other Scriptures" (2 Peter iii. 16). Even if the authorship of 2 Peter be disputed, there is no question that Our Lord connects the coming of the Spirit of Truth with the teaching and special enlightenment of His Apostles (John xvi. 13). "The traditional belief in the inspiration of the New Testament finds its justification in the promises of divine assistance made by Our Lord to the Apostles and their company, and the special gifts of the

Spirit possessed by the Apostolic age."[1] But while the fact of this unique inspiration of the Scriptures is assumed, nowhere do we get a precise definition of inspiration either in the Early Church or in the New Testament. St. Paul calls the Scriptures ἱερὰ γράμματα, and if we take the more natural construction given in the A. V. and R. V. margin, he predicates of πᾶσα γραφὴ that it is Θεόπνευστος (2 Tim. iii. 16), while St. Peter declares quite as definitely that "men spake from God being moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter i. 20); but in what precise way the "men" were "moved" (φερόμενοι) he does not say.

In conformity with this Scriptural reserve our Church is content to assert the divine inspiration of Scripture by describing it as "God's Word written" (Article XX) or "the very pure Word of God" (Preface P.B.). But even though πᾶσα γραφὴ θεόπνευστος, it does not follow that every word contained in Scripture conveys to us a distinct divine message, or is of equal value and importance. We must distinguish between the type and purpose of inspiration. The writers were certainly guided and inspired in selecting the most important material for the imparting of necessary information, while they were supernaturally enabled to transmit to us an accurate record of events. Thus we are told that a selection of the sayings and "signs" of Jesus were made in order to prove that He was the Son of God and the Saviour of those believing in Him (St. John xxi. 25 and xx. 31), while the outstanding facts of this "Gospel" of our redemption, were not only supernaturally prophesied, but also accurately preserved to us by a supernatural proclamation "through them that preached the Gospel unto you by the Holy Ghost sent forth from Heaven" (1 Peter i. 11-12). At other times the inspiration involved a direct communication from God, as in 1 Cor. xi. 23, "I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you." But obviously since the Scriptures contain the records of the evil deeds and speeches of ungodly men, as well as of the sins and shortcomings of God's own people, they do not always record God's *Words* although they are the "Word of God," inasmuch as their writers were divinely inspired as to what they included and excluded from the sacred revelation. That is, everything in Scripture, for its own time and place and purpose, is necessary. It was a perfect revelation for the period or stage for which it was given, but the full, final and complete revelation of God's will and purpose for mankind was only unveiled to us by Jesus Christ. He was "the effulgence of the Father's glory." And although in Old Testa-

[1] Swete "The Holy Spirit in the N.T." 389.

ment days "God spoke unto the fathers ἐν τοῖς προφήταις[1] Πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτροπῶς, yet in the New Testament revelation He "spoke by His Son" (Heb. i. 2). "And He whom God sent spake the words of God" and "God gave not the Spirit by measure unto Him" (John iii. 34).

Its Method (a) Mechanical.

It is well, however, before considering the special views of the Reformers on this question to notice one or two of the chief theories which have been, and are still, held concerning the mode of the inspiration of the Scriptures. There is what has been described as the *Mechanical* view. This regards the sacred writers as mere machines and instruments used by the Holy Spirit to convey God's message and teaching. They are simply the keys of the organ or the tools used by the "Workman." Montanus advanced a similar theory for prophecy in the Early Church when he said "Behold the man is as a lyre, and I (the Spirit) sweep over him as a plectrum. The man sleeps and I wake."[2] Athenagoras also adopts this view of prophecy, declaring that the prophets "were lifted in ecstasy above the natural operations of their minds, and by the impulses of the divine Spirit uttered the things with which they were inspired, the Spirit making use of them as a flute player breathes into a flute."[3] Several of the early Fathers seem to hold a view akin to this theory of inspiration. Origen declares "Equidem ne iota quidem unum, vel unum apicem in divinis praeceptis inanem esse existimo",[4] and this is reiterated by Clement of Alexandria who says that "not one tittle can pass away because it is spoken by the Holy Ghost."[5]

Although the mechanical view has been a popular theory it is open to serious objection since it would regard the writer not only as supernaturally guided in the use of his words and the direction of his thoughts but as having *no control over* the use of his words. The writer's individuality would play no part whatever in his work. Now since Revelation records God's thoughts and purposes for the blessing of mankind, it would seem imperative that if we are to know His Will and His thoughts, they must be put into words, and thus inspiration must in some degree extend to the words of

[1] The force of this statement would seem to indicate that God not merely spoke through the Old Testament prophets, but that *in* their voice we actually hear His voice.

[2] Neander "Church History" II. 207.

[3] "Plea for the Christians" Ch. IX. p. 384 (1867) Ante Nicene Christian Library.

[4] Works III. p. 734 (1759). In Matt. xvi. 12.

[5] "Protrept" 9. sect. 82.

Scripture. This is confirmed by St. Paul who says, " which things also we speak not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth but which the Holy Ghost teacheth " (1 Cor. ii. 13).[1] In fact it is impossible to think apart from words, and so if the Holy Spirit " teacheth " the writers wisdom, He must do so not only through the medium of their thoughts, but also by the words which express those thoughts. But even so the fact that the Holy Spirit teaches the writers the wisdom of God in His revelations to them, is evidence that the writers are not mere machines automatically recording God's messages to mankind. The revelations are indeed communicated to them in Spirit-taught words, but this does not destroy the individuality of the writers or their conscious co-operation with the Holy Spirit's illumination. It does mean that they are unerringly led to choose the right words, in their own language and style, since they were not restrained in the exercise of their faculties.

The Bible may therefore " as to a very large proportion of its contents " be " naturally and humanly written " but it is " God made all through." " It is in a sense quite peculiar to itself divine." The human element may come out in " its type and utterance " but " as to its message, it is authoritative, it is from God."[2] We may say that if the Holy Spirit made no use of the individuality of the writers, the question would at once arise, what language would the Scriptures have been written in ? It might well have been one of which the writers themselves were ignorant. It is also obvious from the differences and peculiarities of style, diction and disposition, which are so distinctly marked on the pages of Scripture, that the sacred writers fully retained their own individuality. How otherwise can we account for the graphic style of a Mark, the argumentative language of a Paul, or the majestic style of an Isaiah ?

Further, such a theory is precluded by the varying readings of the Hebrew and Greek texts of Scripture, while the theory of a direct verbal dictation by the Holy Spirit would surely mean that it would be as sinful to doubt the exact accuracy of a genealogy, or of the numbers of people slain in a battle, as to reject the teaching given in the Sermon on the Mount. But no theory of inspiration should shut out the relative importance of different parts or statements of Scripture. We cannot exalt comparatively unimportant details to be on a level with the truths of redemption. Moreover, in the absence of the original documents it would seem difficult to

[1] Thus St. Paul carefully distinguishes between " seed " and " seeds " in referring to the divine promise to Abraham (Gal. iii. 16).
[2] Moule " Philippian Studies," 141-2.

deny certain trivial discrepancies due possibly to copyist's errors, in references to the same incidents, such as when Stephen asserts that it was Abraham and not Jacob who bought a piece of ground at Sychem from the sons of Emmor (Acts vii. 16 and Genesis xxxiii. 19).

But even if we should admit these unimportant errors or discrepancies, it would not affect the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures, which belongs rather to the writers of the books than to the exact statements of the particular individuals mentioned in them. It was only the authors who were divinely inspired and who were commissioned to write a true record, and their full inspiration is not affected even if that faithful record involved the exposure of a slight lapse of memory on the part of one of God's saints, as may be the case in Stephen's speech. He was a man, it is true, "full of faith and of the Holy Ghost," but even such a man is not necessarily preserved from making a slight misstatement in recalling an historical incident.

(b) Dynamical.

But another general mode of inspiration which has gained greater acceptance is that which has been described as *dynamical*. This is capable of considerable variety of definition, but usually it allows individuality to the writers of the different books although it regards them as channels of a divine revelation or communication.

The form of their message is determined by the personal character and history of each particular writer. Under this head we may place the view styled *Plenary Inspiration* which involves at least four statements (1) That the impulse to write was given from God. In other words, the authors wrote as they were "moved by the Holy Ghost." (2) Their understanding was enlightened by the Holy Spirit so that their writings were preserved from all material error. (3) They were divinely guided in the selection of their materials so that nothing was omitted or added against the Will of God. (4) They received special divine help in order to complete their work accurately.

This view of the plenary inspiration of Scripture probably most accurately fits the general teaching of the Early Fathers of the Church on this subject, although at times they seem to advance to a complete verbal dictation of Scripture. But, speaking generally, while they usually admitted the individuality of the writers, they always insisted strongly on the perfect and full inspiration of their writings as the direct outcome of the teaching of the Holy Spirit. As Irenæus puts it, "We are properly assured that

the Scriptures are indeed perfect since they were spoken by the Word of God and His Spirit" ("quia Scripturae quidem perfectae sunt, quippe a Verbo Dei et Spiritu ejus dictae.")[1]

Similarly, Origen definitely declares "this also is a part of the Church's teaching that the Scriptures were written by the Spirit of God."[2] He also states that the inherent power and appeal of the Scriptures are a further testimony to their divine origin. "The Scriptures themselves which contained these predictions (of Christ) were divinely inspired. If any one moreover consider the words of the prophets with all the zeal and reverence which they deserve it is certain that in the perusal he will be led by his own emotions to believe that those words which have been deemed to be the words of God are not the compositions of men."[2] Again, Justin Martyr declares that the writers of Scripture "received the truth from God. . . For it was not possible for men to know such great and divine things by nature, nor by human conception, but by the gift, which then descended from above upon holy men."[3]

Accordingly, the great condemnation of the early heresies lay in their denial of the sacred Scriptures. Eusebius, the Church historian, records the statement of an orthodox churchman, early in the third century, against those denying the deity of Christ. "They have tampered," he declares, "with the divine Scriptures without fear, they have set aside the rule of the primitive faith . . . either they do not believe that the divine Scriptures *were spoken by the Holy Ghost*, and therefore are unbelievers, or they consider themselves wiser than the Holy Spirit, and what is that but devil possession?" "Eusebius" (Lawlor and Oulton) i. 174.

(c) Partial.

Another theory or mode of Inspiration, which is increasingly finding favour to-day, is rather more difficult to class as truly "dynamical." It is expressed in various ways, but generally it endeavours to distinguish the revelation from its record. It affirms that the "Bible is not the Word of God but only contains it." It is a theory which is very indefinite and unsatisfactory when we endeavour to apply it practically. It may for instance appear at first sight a real and valuable distinction to declare that "it is the mind of Christ, not the

[1] "Writings of Irenæus" Bk. II. p. 220 (1868).

[2] "Writings of Origen" Vol I. De Principiis. Preface 8. p. 5 (1869). "The Evangelists," Origen says in another place, "cannot have made any mistake or set down anything falsely." "Works In Joannem" iv. 134 (1759); "De Principiis" Vol I. Bk. IV. 286 (1869).

[3] "Writings of Justin Martyr" Ad Graec. Ch. viii. p. 294 (1867).

letter of Holy Scripture which is authoritative,"[1] but it is very difficult to understand how we are to arrive at the "mind of Christ," if "the letter of Holy Scripture" is not an "authoritative" conveyance of His words and teaching to us? And this task surely becomes even a greater problem, when another modern writer, although unwilling to surrender the Johannine authorship of the Fourth Gospel, tells us that St. John "puts into the mouth of Jesus Christ words which *we cannot always be sure that He uttered.*"[2] And yet rather inconsistently the same writer tells us that "Inspiration is a term applicable rather to the writers of the Bible than to what they wrote. It is not the record which is inspired but the men who composed it." Such a theory apparently found its advocates in the seventeenth century, since the saintly Richard Baxter speaks of those "that believe that the Spirit did guide the writers to truth . . . but doubt whether their pens were as perfectly guided as their minds."[3] But on such an hypothesis it is reasonable to ask what is the value of the divine "inspiration" of a writer who attributes to Our Lord words which probably He never spoke? The Scriptures themselves tell us that the primary purpose of God's revelation is to make men "wise unto salvation" (2 Tim. iii. 14). For "the Bible is not primarily a record of man's thoughts about God, but a record of what God has done and revealed of Himself to man. In this sacred volume," it has been well said, "we have everything we need to acquaint us fully with the mind and will of God for our salvation, and to supply us for all ends of our spiritual life."[4] But on the theory that "the record" is not inspired and trustworthy, the question arises how can such a record guarantee to us a divine revelation on this all-important subject? The "writers" may be "inspired," but they have long since passed away, so they are not able to tell us God's will and purpose for us except through their "writings," and if these are unreliable how are we to secure a divine revelation concerning our redemption? Such a theory directly challenges the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit on the writers, enabling them to give us a faithful record of the divine revelation which they received. In what sense could they be "moved by the Holy Ghost" to write, if their writings are not trustworthy? Moreover, it only seems to lead to greater confusion of thought when this theory of inspiration is interpreted to cover the extraordinary statement that "If St. Paul were living to-day he

[1] Canon Rogers in "Liberal Evangelicalism," p. vi.
[2] Canon Storr "Liberal Evangelicalism," p. 93.
[3] G. D. Boyle "Richard Baxter" 160 (1883).
[4] Orr "Problem of O. T." p. 44 and 49.

would state his doctrine of the Cross differently" (Canon Storr). Such a view would seem to destroy even the inspiration of the "writers" and leave the contemporary interpreter free to re-write the "record of revelation" in accordance with what *he* deemed to be the intellectual conditions and requirements of his time. In any case it certainly seems to conflict with St. Paul's own statement of direct divine revelation both for the doctrine of the Cross and of the Resurrection, when he declares definitely "I delivered unto you first of all, that *which I also received*, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. xv. 3).

It is also not easy to see how we can reconcile the statement of Article XX that the Bible is "God's Word Written" with this theory that it only "contains the Word of God," since such a statement surely implies that the whole Bible is divinely inspired and not only some of its "contents," a theory moreover which is surely at variance with the evident claim of the Scriptures to possess that authority and infallibility which belong to the Word of God.[1] For if the Bible be thus only partially inspired, where are we to find the infallible guide who will unerringly discriminate between the true and the false? While it is true that the divine revelation has been mediated to us through the individuality of the human agents who recorded it, yet it is not only illegitimate but practically impossible to discriminate between the human and divine elements so as to declare that one was written under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the other not. For the truth and value of the revelation not infrequently depend on the accuracy of the historical record. It is impossible therefore to accept Professor Sanday's clear cut division, when he declares that "In all that relates to the Revelation of God and His Will the writers assert an authority higher than their own. But in regard to the narrative of events and to the processes of literary composition, there is nothing so exceptional about them as to exempt them from the conditions to which other words would be exposed at the same place and time."[2] Such a theory fails, as Bishop Ellicott pointed out, to distinguish "the mysterious interpenetration, of the Divine and human elements which coexist in the Holy Scriptures, and the resultant unity in that

[1] "When ye received the Word of God, which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" 1 Thess. ii. 13. "I commend you to God and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up" Acts xx. 32. "For ever, O Lord, Thy Word is settled in heaven" Psl. cxix. 89. "The Scripture cannot be broken" John xi. 35.

[2] "The Oracles of God," p. 75.

which, thus considered, is rightly defined as the Word of God."[1]

The Reformers' Views.

We can scarcely estimate aright the views which the Reformers held on the inspiration of the Scriptures without glancing first of all at the environment in which they were nurtured. Although they had been profoundly influenced by the teaching and outlook of the "humanist" movement, the traditional views of the mediæval "Schoolmen" still held considerable sway in Christian thought. Speaking generally we may say that the Schoolmen identified Inspiration with verbal dictation. They certainly held the mechanical theory that the sacred writers were mere "wheels of the Spirit." Moreover, not only were they very largely ignorant of Hebrew and Greek, but they denounced these languages as "heretical" tongues, the study of which was most dangerous. As evidence of this they pointed to the Revival of Letters in Italy, with its spirit of free inquiry which had produced such serious sceptical results south of the Alps. They regarded the Vulgate, with its inaccurate translations and faulty manuscripts, as supernaturally unimpeachable.

The Oxford Reformers.

Those styled the "Oxford Reformers"—Erasmus, Colet and More—and others, differed considerably from the mediæval Schoolmen in their treatment of the Scriptures, and especially of its interpretation. In one sense they agreed with Luther in placing a supreme value on the Scriptures, and especially on the New Testament, because it gave them an intimate and first hand knowledge and picture of the life and teaching of Our Lord. They did not want Christ's teaching and character mediated through the Fathers, still less through the Schoolmen. They wished to read for themselves the best and earliest copies of the sacred Scriptures and thus get at the fountain head of Truth. But unlike Luther they valued the New Testament more for its ethical standards than for its doctrinal truths. They were not concerned to impugn mediæval doctrines, but to reform mediæval abuses by a return to the study of the life and teaching of Christ. While they laid down no theory of Inspiration, they handled the Scriptures far more freely than the Schoolmen, and often in a way which precluded the idea of a mechanical verbal inspiration. In fact, Erasmus admitted that unimportant discrepancies in the Scriptures were due to a lapse of memory on the part of the writers. He attributed no supernatural

[1] "The Church and the Age," p. 52.

infallibility to them in expressions and minor details. "Christ alone is called the Truth, He alone was free from all error." It would probably be correct to say that the doctrinal Reformers, especially those on the Continent, held views on Inspiration, if not identical, at least far more akin to those of the disciples of the Renaissance than to the rigid mechanical theories of the Schoolmen. Moreover, their appeal to the Scriptures was made from an entirely different standpoint to that of the mediæval theologians. As Principal Lindsay well put it, the latter "looked at the Bible as a sort of spiritual law book, a storehouse of divinely communicated knowledge of devotional truths and rules for moral conduct and nothing more," whereas "The Reformers saw in it a new home for a new life within which they could have intimate fellowship with God Himself—not merely knowledge about God, but actual communion with Him."[1]

The Foreign Reformers—Luther.

It has been well said that "as a religious movement the Reformation without Luther is unthinkable."[2] But if we commence our study with this great champion and outstanding figure of the Reformation, we find that it is exceedingly difficult to form any precise and definite opinion of Luther's exact view of Inspiration. He was certainly often most inconsistent, since frequently his theory by no means tallies with his practice. From several of his statements we should justly conclude that he was a firm upholder of a rigid theory of verbal inspiration, while at other times his treatment and interpretation of the books of Scripture would lead us to regard him almost as a "modernist." A good deal of this apparent contradiction is due to his peculiar view of the Bible. For Luther divides "the whole Scripture of God into two parts"—the "precepts and promises."

The precepts are contained in the Old Testament and lead to repentance by showing the impossibility of fulfilling the demands of the law, and so the "promises of God" are the New Testament, which tell of the Gospel of salvation through Christ.[3] This latter Gospel is, with Luther, distinguished

[1] "Hist. of Reform'n," I. 445.

[2] Mackinnon "Luther and Refor'n," p. v.

[3] In his *Loci Communes Theologici* (Chap. xx.) "On the Gospel," Melancthon makes a somewhat similar distinction. He asserts that there are two kinds of promises in Scripture, one relating to the law, which "are conditional and leave the conscience in a state of doubtful anxiety," and the other (containing "blessings which are certain") relating to the Gospel, "gratuitously bestowed for the sake of Christ and including forgiveness of sin, reconciliation and justification before God."

as pre-eminently the "Word of God," although the former, as leading up to the Gospel, may also be called that; since he explains "For not one Word of God only, but both, should be preached, new and old things should be brought out of the treasury *as well the voice of the law as the word of grace.*" "The voice of the law should be brought forward that men may be terrified and brought to acknowledge of their sins, and thence converted to penitence and a better manner of life. But we must not stop here, that would be to wound only and not to bind up. Therefore the *word* of grace and of the promised remission of sin must also be preached, in order to teach and set up faith."[1]

Thus while Luther in a general way regarded all Scripture as the Word of God, in a deeper, inner sense he limited this term to the Gospel message. "Let us therefore," he says, "hold it for certain and firmly established that the soul can do without everything except the Word of God, without which none at all of its wants are provided for."[2] Here he explains the "Word of God" to mean "the Gospel of God concerning His Son, incarnate, suffering, risen and glorified through the Spirit, the sanctifier." A similar explanation is certainly given us by St. Peter concerning the atoning work of Christ with the conclusion that "this is the Word of God which by *the gospel* is preached unto you" (1 Peter i. 25).

In this way Luther does seem to distinguish between the Scriptures and the Word of God revealed by them. This latter is the message of salvation through Christ which can be received by faith only, "For the Word of God cannot be received and honoured by any works, but by faith alone. Hence it is clear that as the soul needs the *word* alone, for life and justification, so it is justified by faith alone and not by any works."[3] This distinction probably goes far to explain Luther's free treatment of some parts of Scripture. He neglects or discards them because he sees nothing in them of the "gospel of God in Christ." The ministry of the Word is for Luther the "ministry of Christ," that is of the promises of God in Christ. "Christ," he declares, "was sent for no other purpose than that of the Word, and the order of Apostles and that of bishops and that of the whole body of clergy, have been called and instituted for no other object but the ministry of the Word."[4] Thus the promises of God with Luther are equivalent to the "inner" "Word of God," since they reveal God's salvation through Christ.

1 "Primary Works," 278 (On Christian Liberty).
2 Ibid. 257.
3 Primary Works, 258.
4 Ibid.

"For," as he puts it, "repentance comes from the law of God, but faith or grace comes from the promises of God." "Faith cometh by hearing, hearing by the Word of God" (Romans x. 17).[1] Thus the Scriptures are the Word of God, at least in its "inner" sense, to Luther inasmuch and in so far as they bring to us the promises of God in Christ, and his great aim is thus to see "Christ in the Scriptures." In his Preface to the Exposition of 1 Peter, Luther says, "Those Apostles who treat oftenest and highest of how faith in Christ alone justifies, are the best Evangelists. Therefore are St. Paul's Epistles more a Gospel than Matthew, Mark and Luke. For these do not set down much more than the story of the works and miracles of Christ, but the grace which we receive through Christ, no one so boldly extols as St. Paul, especially in his letter to the Romans."[2] As Professor Mackinnon says of Luther's views, "The whole Bible and especially the prophets is to be understood of Christ and is a revelation of the will and grace of God in Christ."[3] Consequently Luther judges all the books of the Bible from this standpoint, although in the earlier periods of his career, when he was engaged on his commentary on the Romans in 1515, he accepts the Bible as the literal word of God or Christ. In his "Introduction" in 1522 Luther calls the Epistle to the Romans "the kernel of the New Testament and the clearest of all gospels, worthy and worth that a Christian man should not only know by heart, but should converse with them continually as the daily bread of his soul." In his selective process he goes so far as to say that "St. John's Gospel and his first Epistle, St. Paul's Epistles and especially Romans, Galatians and Ephesians and St. Peter's First Epistle are the books which teach all that is necessary for salvation even if you read no other book. They are the right kernel and marrow of all books." And he adds that "In *comparison with them* James is a right straw Epistle, for it has no evangelic manner about it."[4] In his "Table Talk" Luther was far more severe in his strictures on the Epistle of James. He refused to attempt to reconcile the teaching of St. James with that of St. Paul. James, he says, compares "faith" to the "body" when it should rather be compared to the "soul." "The ancients saw this and did not consider the Epistle canonical." And then he condemns it by his supreme

[1] Ibid. 278. At other times Luther clearly identifies the Bible with the Word of God. "How shall we prosper," he asks, "so long as we act so perversely and degrade the Bible, *the holy word of God*"? Primary Works 232 "Address to the Nobility."

[2] Werke Ed. Walch IX. 626.

[3] Mackinnon "Luther and the Reformation," 173.

[4] Preface to New Test. of 1524. Werke xiv. 104-5 Ed. Walch.

test of the value of Scripture. "Let us banish this Epistle from the University, for it is worthless. It has *no syllable about Christ*, not even naming Him except once at the beginning. I think it was written by some Jew who had heard of the Christians and not joined them." In the same way Luther disparaged the Book of Revelation, holding it to be neither prophetic nor apostolic "since Christ is not taught nor recognised in it." In fact, as he expressed it, "that which does not teach Christ is not apostolic even if a Peter or a Paul taught it." "On the other hand," he asserts, "whatever does preach Christ would be apostolic even though it proceeded from Judas, Pilate or Herod. But this James only preaches law and obedience to the law, and mixes the one with the other in a confusing fashion. Therefore I will not admit him in my Bible among the number of true canonical writers. But at the same time I will forbid none to place and esteem him as they please."[1]

Luther thus in effect challenged the authority and integrity of Scripture, although from a totally different angle to that of the modern "higher critic." His criticism arose from his keen faith in, and loyalty to Christ and His teaching, although we must admit that practically the result, in accepting or rejecting certain books on his own independent judgment, was much the same. But if his "principle" was identical, his "purpose" was quite different from that of the modern destructive critic. For he was not seeking in any way to undermine or weaken the authority of God's Word, but rather to exalt those portions of it, which according to his theory of Holy Scripture, were in a full and supreme sense deserving of that designation.

We may therefore say that Luther's theory of Inspiration is largely dependent on his view of the Canon of Scripture, and, as we have seen, he certainly challenged the traditional and accepted canon of Scripture, if not in theory at least in practice, when it seemed to conflict with his own defined purpose of Inspiration. In this way he virtually selected a Canon of his own from the Canon of Scripture. "We will neither see nor hear Moses," he declares, "for Moses was only given to the Jewish people and does not concern us Gentile Christians."[2]

There is abundant evidence that he freely criticised the comparative worth and relative importance of the different books of Scripture. Where, for instance, as in historical statements, faith is not concerned, Luther affirms that "the predictions of the prophets concerning the Kings and secular

[1] Quoted Murray "Erasmus and Luther" 166-7.
[2] Kostlin "Luther's Theologie" 2. 78 (1883).

affairs often turned out wrong. They were things pleasing to the inquisitive but were unnecessary prophecies for they neither taught nor furthered the Christian Faith."[1]

Thus Job was an allegory, " the Books of Kings were a thousand paces ahead of Chronicles and more to be believed. Ecclesiastes has neither boots nor spurs but rides in socks as I did when I was in the cloister," although he recognises "it as Holy Scripture written by some poet or prophet, from the Holy Ghost." But in his Preface to the Psalter he says, " it should be dear to us if only because it so clearly promises Christ's death and resurrection and prefigures His kingdom with the estate and nature of all Christendom, so that it may well be called a small bible wherein all that stands in Scripture is most fairly and briefly comprehended."[2] He speaks of Joel as " a good and meek man," and says of Amos, " he is a strong character and scolds the people of Israel almost throughout the whole book. He may well be called Amos, that is, a burden, or one who is severe and scathing"; and although, when lecturing on the Bible, Luther " took Jonah whale and all literally," yet on another occasion he declared that " if Jonah were not in the Bible he would laugh at it."[3] Moreover he regarded the Epistle of Jude as " unnecessary, secondhand but non-apostolic."

Yet this critical handling of Scripture is certainly very inconsistent with his clearly expressed view of its plenary inspiration and authority. For in commenting on Hebrews ii. 13 he says " One letter, yea a single tittle of the Scripture is of more and greater consequence than heaven and earth." " The Holy Ghost," he affirms, " is neither foolish nor drunk to utter a tittle, much less a letter in vain." Again in his work " de servo Arbitrio " published in 1525 in answer to the attack of Erasmus, he advances his doctrine of the infallibility of Scripture, and strongly resents the assertion of seeming contradictions in the Bible. Every part, he argues, must be taken literally and all must be made to agree, since the whole is plenarily inspired by divine wisdom so that there can be no diversity of doctrine.[4] In fact, he regards Scripture as God's voice and message to man conveyed through the human writer. Thus he speaks of God's commands " declared by the mouth of Isaiah."[5] Again, in commenting on Isaiah liv. 1. Luther distinctly regards the prophecy as being uttered under the direct and full inspiration of the Holy

[1] Werke Erl. Ed 8², p. 23.
[2] Preserved Smith " Life and Letters of Martin Luther," p. 268 (1911).
[3] Preserved Smith, u.s. 185.
[4] Preserved Smith, u.s. 208.
[5] " Primary Works " 363.

Ghost, if not by His verbal dictation, when he says " But the Holy Ghost turneth this sentence," and again " hear this joyful tidings which the Holy Ghost bringeth unto thee out of the words of the prophets."[1] Also in his commentary on Galatians he says that people " hear not only Paul, but in Paul, Christ Himself, and God the Father sending Him out in his message."[2] Again in his hymn which is based on Psalm 46 Luther certainly advocates plenary inspiration when he says—

> " God's Word, for all their craft and force
> One moment shall not linger,
> But spite of Hell, shall have its course;
> Tis written by His finger."

Although Luther so freely exercised his reason and judgment in criticising the books of Scripture, yet he certainly was no rationalist in the sense of opposing reason to faith. In fact, he called " reason " " a poisonous beast with many dragons' heads." " In the Bible," he says, " not one word is of so small account as to allow of our understanding it by reason." " In the words of Scripture which lie open to us and all the world, no one," he declares, " owing to the darkening of the mind, is able to discern the smallest iota so long as he has not the Spirit of God ; no one possesses the inner sense or true knowledge requisite."[3] As late as 1545 in his work against the Papacy he condemns this abuse of reason. " This writer," he declares, " would have done better to leave his reason at home or to ground it on texts of Scripture, rather than ridiculously and crazily to found faith and the divine law on reason."[4]

Again, although Luther so completely discards the Epistle of James, so that even when he wrote his " Babylonish Captivity," he doubted its authorship, yet inconsistently enough even then, he appeals to its teaching against the practice of extreme unction, and accepts it as authoritative with that of other parts of Holy Scripture, with which he includes it.[5] But in spite of his inconsistencies, it is quite obvious that Luther's criticism of Scripture was the outcome of his strong faith in Christ and of his earnest desire to discover Christ in the Scriptures. " I have on my side the Master and Lord of the Scripture, and let them go in their hostile cry that the Scriptures contradict themselves. Hear thou well, thou art almost a bully with the Scriptures, which

1 On " Galatians " iv. 27.
2 " Galatians " p. 4 (1833).
3 Kostlin " Luther's Theologie," 1², p. 380.
4 Preserved Smith, u.s. 267.
5 Cf. " Primary Works " 402-3 and 409.

are nevertheless under Christ as a servant, and for this end thou bringest out of them what is not altogether the best portion. For this I do not care the slightest, boast away of the servant. I however will glory in Christ, who is the true Lord and Sovereign of the Scriptures. Him I have, and by Him I abide."[1]

We may certainly say that for Luther "the holy revelation is not a mechanical pronouncement of supernatural knowledge but a dynamic unfolding of life,"[2] therefore it is probably correct to affirm that in spite of some very definite statements which we have noticed, "he never formulated any detailed theory of Scriptural inspiration,"[3] although as Dean Wace declares, all "his teaching is based on the sufficiency and supremacy of the Divine Word and the Divine promise."[4] But however true this may be, in practice we must admit that in theory, at least, his interpretation of inspiration was very broad, indefinite and unsatisfactory, since he held that revelation had not only been progressive, but was still continuous, so that the Word of God was not confined to the Scriptures. God's revelation was not, in Luther's view, limited to the written record, since His Word still comes to us now as it did in times past to the Fathers. "God," he declared, "speaks true essential things. Thus sun and moon, Peter and Paul, thou and I, are nothing but words of God." "The multitude of Christians in believing that God spoke to holy men of old have altogether forgotten that he speaks to them still, though neither then nor now does He raise the finite to the capacities of the infinite, so that neither they nor we were made either perfect or all wise, or on all subjects infallible, although moved by the Holy Ghost. There was a time when patriarchs and prophets had no Old Testament and when saints and martyrs had no New Testament."[5] This ambiguous statement may of course mean no more than that believers now hear God's voice, and that the inspired writers were not infallible on all subjects, but at first sight it seems to imply a loose view of inspiration strangely at variance with his other statements asserting the plenary inspiration of Scripture, and of "God's Word" having been "written by His finger." If this be his real meaning, such a theory is dangerous, since it leaves us with no definite standard by which to test divine inspiration. It seems to place the questionable inspired utterance of an

[1] Quoted Farrar, Bampton Lecture, p. 338.
[2] Romberg "Die Lehre Luther's von der heiligen Schrift" Wittemb, 1868.
[3] Kostlin "Life of Luther" 2^2, p. 15.
[4] "Primary Works," 447.
[5] Quoted Farrar, u.s. 340.

individual believer on a level with the writings of Apostles and companions of Apostles to whom the Holy Spirit's assistance was specially promised. Thus in effect it would lower and dethrone the special inspiration of the sacred writers.

In regard to current controversies, however, we can scarcely imagine that Luther would have any sympathy with kenotic theories as to our Lord's knowledge, or even assert that "He condescended not to know."[1] Since when writing in 1530, he says "What Christ says must be so whether I or any man can understand it," or when answering the Emperor's questions at the Diet of Worms, in 1521 he declares "If the Lord Himself, who knew that *He could not err*, did not scorn to hear testimony against His doctrine from a miserable servant, how much more should . . I . ."[2] We may safely affirm that he would certainly have endorsed the definite statement of a celebrated modern historian when he says "Our Lord's omniscience is the essence of the personality in which manhood and Godhead unite in Him. With this belief I feel that I am bound to accept the language of Our Lord with reference to the Old Testament Scriptures as beyond appeal. Where He says that Moses or the prophets wrote or spoke of Him (and the report of His saying this depends on the authority of His Evangelist) I accept His warrant for understanding that Moses and the Prophets did write and speak of Him, in the sense in which I believe He means it. When He speaks of David in spirit calling Him "Lord," I believe that David in spirit did call Him Lord, and I am not affected by doubts thrown on the authorship of the 110th Psalm, except so far as to use His authority to set those doubts aside."[3]

Zwingli.

Huldreich Zwingli was a striking contrast in many ways to his great contemporary Luther. Whereas Luther had been nurtured in scholastic theology, Zwingli knew practically nothing of it. Luther was not much attracted by humanist teaching, while Zwingli was reared under its influence and had a great admiration for Erasmus. It was Luther's very real and serious spiritual struggle and experience which so profoundly influenced his theology and even his treatment of the Scriptures. Zwingli had not suffered in this way. Luther had started his career as a zealous papalist, whereas Zwingli had been reared under the freer, more independent and detached atmosphere of republican Switzerland, with its comparative immunity from papal claims and domination.

[1] Sanday "Oracles of God," p. 111.
[2] Preserved Smith, u.s. 267 and 117.
[3] Bishop Stubbs "Biblical Criticism" 22-3.

The orthodox humanists had, as we have seen, been keen to get back to the clear teaching of the Scriptures, and Zwingli also regarded "the sacred writings as a sacred anchor, not to put trust in which is most faithless and wicked." "I came at length," he says, "to have trust in nothing and in no words so much as in those which proceeded *out of the mouth of God*," "I began to try every doctrine by this touchstone."[1] Again, in rebutting the argument that the inspiration of the Scriptures depends on the approval of the Church, Zwingli expresses a similar view of its divine origin, when he declares it "the height of impiety to think that which (in the language of Proverbs) sprang from the mouth not of a man but of God, not valid unless it had received the approval of human ignorance."[2] Obviously therefore, although Zwingli had arrived at the general Reformed position of the supreme authority of Scripture, he had not departed far from the scholastic view of its inspiration. For if the Scriptures "proceeded from the mouth of God," they must be fully if not verbally inspired. That this was his view is confirmed by the clear statement of the First Helvetic Confession, published in 1536, which had been drawn up by Zwingli, which states "Canonic Scripture, the Word of God, given by the Holy Spirit and set forth to the world by the prophets and Apostles, the most perfect and ancient of all philosophies, alone contains perfectly all piety and the whole of life."[3] This statement, it should be observed, not only enunciates the plenary inspiration of Scripture but also shows no distinction between it and the Word of God.

Calvin.

In John Calvin we have the profoundest intellect and the greatest theologian of the Reformation movement, one whose thought and teaching has probably influenced Reformed doctrine more than any other outstanding figure of that epoch-making period. We will consider presently his great work as an interpreter of Scripture, but in regard to its Inspiration it might possibly be argued, at first sight, that Calvin did not hold any rigid theory of its verbal dictation. For in commenting on Acts vii. 16—that the patriarchs "were carried into Sychem and laid in the sepulchre which Abraham had bought for a sum of money of the sons of Hemor the son of Sychem," he says, "It is manifest that there is a fault in the word Abraham. For Abraham had bought a double cave of Ephron the Hittite . . . but Joseph was buried in another place in the field which his father Jacob had

[1] Works i. 205. "Archeteles" (1912)
[2] Ibid. p. 250.
[3] Article 1.

bought of Hemor, wherefore the place *must be amended*."[1] But it seems more probable that if Calvin related this mistake to the question of Inspiration,[2] he would have attributed the discrepancy to a copyist's error, since in many other places he speaks most strongly and definitely concerning the plenary inspiration of Scripture. His remarks even amount to a theory of mechanical dictation. Commenting on 2 Peter i. 21, he says "holy men were moved . . . because they dared not to announce anything of their own, and obediently followed the Spirit as their guide, *who ruled in their mouth as in His own sanctuary*."[3] Again, Holy Scripture is for him "the eternal and inviolable truth of God," and "since God has seen fit to give us in the Scripture an abiding record of His truth, it is needful for believers to know with certainty that the Scripture has come down from Heaven." "The highest argument used in Scripture," says Calvin, "is always this that the speaker is God. 'Thus saith the Lord.' The prophets and Apostles. . . put forward the sacred name of God that it may compel the obedience of the whole world."

Concerning the precise mode of this divine Inspiration of Scripture, Calvin does not attempt to dogmatise. "Whether God did make Himself known to the Fathers by oracles and visions, or inform them by the ministry and diligence of men, of that which they should afterwards deliver to their posterity, yet it was out of all doubt that the firm certainty of that doctrine was engraven in their hearts, so that they were persuaded and did understand that what they had learned had come from God, for God did always make undoubted assurance of credit for His Word, which did far surpass all uncertain opinion." Calvin is most definite about the divine authority of God's Word. "When Scripture," he says, "speaks of the Word of God, we must not suppose that nothing more is intended than a transient voice, the mere utterance of an oracle or a prophecy. 'The Word of God,' is also the title of that eternal wisdom that is with God and is the source of all oracles and prophecies."[4]

In treating of the authority and Inspiration of Scripture, Calvin declares that "it is a principle which distinguishes our religion from all others, that we know God has spoken to us, and are fully convinced that the prophets did not speak at their own suggestion, but that being organs of the Holy

[1] On "Acts" p. 265 (1844).

[2] As previously urged, the discrepancy in this incident does not rightly touch Inspiration (see p. 17).

[3] "Catholic Epistles" p. 291 (1855).

[4] "Institutes," p. 27 and 44 (J. P. Wiles' translation, 1920).

Spirit, they only uttered what they had been commissioned from heaven to declare. Whoever then wishes to profit in the Scriptures let him first of all lay down as a settled point that the Law and the Prophets are not a doctrine delivered according to the will and pleasure of men, but *dictated by the Holy Spirit.*"[1] Calvin also strongly emphasises the fact that Scripture receives its supreme proof from the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. As this is a popular plea, especially with the Continental Reformers, it is necessary to examine the claim carefully. "If men want arguments for the divine inspiration of Scripture, I answer," says Calvin, "that the witness of the Spirit is superior to all arguments. God in His Word is the only adequate witness concerning Himself, and in like manner His Word will not find true credence in the hearts of men until it is sealed by the witness of His Spirit. The same Spirit that spake by the prophets must enter our heart to convince us that they faithfully delivered the message which He gave them."[2] This would seem to mean that the believer enlightened by God's Spirit must and can test the genuineness of the Inspiration of the sacred writers, and if so it seems scarcely to harmonise with a humble acceptance of St. Peter's declaration that "holy men spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter i. 21), or with St. Paul's assertion that "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. iii. 16). For if we believe that the Apostles were divinely inspired, such statements should surely settle the question of the Inspiration, at least of the Old Testament.[3]

But a closer examination of Calvin's language will show us that he could not have intended his statement to imply that each individual believer might use his spiritually enlightened judgment in accepting or rejecting the inspiration of Scripture. He himself condemns such a claim in combatting the theories of the Anabaptists whom he describes as "giddy men who proudly pretend to be led by the Spirit," and "dare to look down upon the doctrine of Scripture as childish and contemptible. . . They themselves," he explains, "must allow that the apostles and primitive believers were en-

[1] On 2 Tim. iii. 16, p. 249.

[2] "Institutes," p. 28.

[3] It would seem legitimate to argue that St. Paul's statement here includes his own writings as well as the Old Testament "Scriptures," since he exhorts Timothy to "abide in the things thou hast learned knowing of whom thou hast learned them," v. 14. He seems also to associate the "ἱερὰ γράμματα" which Timothy has "known from a babe" with these "things he has learned" from others, and in this source "from others" he would seem to include his own teaching, for in Chapter i. 13 he says "hold fast the pattern of sound words which thou hast heard from *me*."

lightened by that Spirit, and yet not one of them learned from Him to despise the Word of God, but all regarded it with deepest reverence, . . but these unhappy men wilfully go astray to their own ruin, seeking guidance from their own spirit rather than from the Spirit of the Lord." " It is the height of wickedness," Calvin declares, " to assign a fleeting and temporary use to those Scriptures which guide the sons of God to the very end of their journey." " The Holy Spirit," he affirms, " abides in the truth which He has revealed in Scripture . . . and the children of God know that His Word is the instrument by which He communicates to their understandings the light of His Spirit, and they acknowledge no spirit other than the Spirit who dwelt and spake in the Apostles." " Nor is this," Calvin explains, " at variance with what I said . . . that the Word of God does not win our confidence unless it be confirmed by the witness of the Spirit; for the Lord has coupled together by a kind of mutual bond the certainty of His Word and the authority of His Spirit. Real reverence for the Word takes possession of our hearts when the light of the Spirit enables us to see God in the Scriptures and on the other hand we welcome without fear of delusion that Spirit which we recognise by His likeness to His own Word."[1]

What therefore Calvin means by the necessity of the inner witness of the Spirit to the truth of the message of the inspired writers, is that those who are taught by God's Spirit will accept and confirm the fact of the inspiration of the Scriptures. For he goes on to explain that " those who are inwardly taught by the Holy Spirit place firm reliance on Scripture; and that the Scripture is its own evidence and may not lawfully be subjected to proofs and arguments, but obtains by the testimony of the Spirit that *confidence which it deserves*." Calvin, we must remember, is arguing against the theory that the authority and inspiration of Scripture depend solely on the voice of the Church, and while he does not wish to discredit the value of the testimony of antiquity or of the Christian Church to the authority and historicity of the Canon, and thus to the inspiration of Scripture, he wishes to stress the point that such testimony is not intrinsically necessary for one who has the inner witness of the Spirit confirming the power and reality of the inspiration of the Scriptures. " For though," he explains, " by its own majesty it commands our reverence, nevertheless it does not really affect us until it is sealed on our hearts by the Spirit. Being enlightened by His power we no longer owe it to our own judgment or to that of *others* (i.e. to the

[1] " Institutes," pp. 32-4.

testimony of the Church) that we believe the Scripture to be from God, but for reasons beyond human judgment we are *perfectly certain* as if we beheld in it the glory of God Himself, that it came down to us by the instrumentality of men from the very mouth of God." "We subject," he adds, "our judgment and intellect to it as something above and beyond all dispute."[1] In other words, Calvin means, that the Scriptures themselves first of all reveal to us the light and guidance of the Spirit, and then that same Holy Spirit testifies to the inspiration and truth of God's Word. Calvin makes this quite clear when in saying "that we owe to the Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God because it has proceeded from Him alone and has nothing belonging to man mixed with it" (A very strong statement indeed, disclosing his view of Inspiration!), he asks "How can this be known? I answer, both to disciples and teachers, God is made known to be the author of it by the revelation of the Spirit—the same Spirit, therefore, who made Moses and the prophets certain of their calling also testifies to our hearts that He has employed them as His servants to instruct us. None," he adds, "but those who have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit have eyes to perceive, *what ought indeed to have been visible to all*, and yet is visible to the elect alone."[2]

It is interesting to notice that "higher critics" had their forerunners even in Calvin's day. If they did not, like Wellhausen, refer to Abraham as "the free creation of unconscious art," they at least held doubts as to the historicity of Moses. Calvin, however, assumed the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and the historicity of Daniel, and he referred to such critics as "certain worthless men" "who desire to show their own cleverness by assailing the truth of God," since "they ask, who can prove to us that Moses and the prophets really wrote the books which bear their names? Nay, they even dare to raise the question whether there ever was such a person as Moses."[3]

Bullinger.

If we turn to the writings of another eminent Swiss divine, the successor of Zwingli at Zurich and the close friend and adviser of many of our Elizabethan clergy, we find that Henry Bullinger held very much the same view of the nature and Inspiration of the Scriptures as Calvin. He calls the Scriptures "the very Word of God," "the Word of God uttered to the world by the prophets and Apostles," and referring to

[1] "Institutes," p. 28.
[2] On 2 Tim. iii. 16. p. 249. (1866).
[3] Ibid. 31.

2 Timothy iii. 16, he says that St. Paul applies this declaration to the New Testament as well as the Old.[1] He seems to accept the canonical books of the Bible on the testimony of the Church, since he numbers the books of the Old Testament and New Testament as we now have them, excluding the Apocrypha. Bullinger also uses language about the Scriptures which proves at least that he thoroughly accepted their plenary inspiration, although it would seem that he did not hold a theory of mechanical verbal dictation, when he says, "Although the Apostles were men, yet their doctrine first of all taught by a lively expressed voice and after that set down in writing with pen and ink, is the doctrine of God and the very true Word of God." And he goes on to prove the origin and certainty of it, declaring that "The Word of God is the speech of God, that is to say, the revealing of His good will to mankind, which from the beginning, one while by His own mouth, another while by the speech of angels, He did open to those first ancient and most holy fathers, who again by tradition did faithfully deliver it to their posterity. These things had their beginning of one and the same Spirit of God. Let us therefore in all things believe the Word of God delivered to us by the Scriptures. Let us think that the Lord Himself which is the very living and eternal God, doth speak to us by the Scriptures."[2] Bullinger here certainly identifies the Scriptures with the Word of God and regards them as fully, if not verbally, inspired.

Reformed Confessions of Faith.

If we examine the foreign Reformed Confessions of Faith we find that they speak with no uncertain sound on the inspiration of the Scriptures. They certainly accept their plenary inspiration, if not their mechanical verbal dictation, neither do they appear to make any clear or subtle distinction between the Scriptures and the Word of God. The Confession of Scotland 1560, which expresses the opinion of John Knox as the most prominent of its compilers, practically asserts that the Scriptures are from the "mouth of God," when it promises in the "Preface" "satisfaction from the mouth of God, that is from His holy Scriptures."[3] "We believe," says the Latter Confession of Helvetia 1566, "and confess the Canonical Scriptures of the holy prophets and Apostles of both Testaments to be the very true Word of God, and to have sufficient authority of themselves, not of men. For God yet speaketh unto us by the

1 "Decades," i. 70 and 61-2.
2 "Decades" i. 57.
3 "Works of Knox" ii. 96 (1848).

Holy Scriptures. We therefore detest all heresies of Artemon, the Manichees, . . . who denied that the Scriptures proceeded from the Holy Ghost" (Article 1).

The Confession of Bohemia 1573 is most definite, and certainly challenges any theory of a continuous revelation and inspiration being on a par with that of the sacred Scriptures. "All the ministers of our Churches teach with one consent, concerning the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament . . . that it is true, certain and worthy to be believed, whereunto no other human writings whatsoever, or of what sort soever they be, may be compared. First it is inspired and taught of the Holy Ghost, and uttered by the mouths of men. Secondly it is a true and sure testimony without which revelation of Scripture there is no wholesome knowledge, nor faith nor access to God. . . This persuasion and belief concerning holy Scripture, viz., that it is taught and inspired of God, is the beginning and ground of our Christian profession" (Chap. 1). The Confession of Belgia 1566 is equally emphatic, when it says "We confess that this Word of God was not brought or delivered by any will of man, but that holy men of God, inspired by God's Holy Spirit, spake it. He Himself also wrote the two Tables of the Law with His own finger; which is the cause why we call such writings sacred and divine Scripture" (Article 3).

The Lutheran "Confession of Wurtemburg" 1552 might even be construed as enunciating a mechanical view of Inspiration, when it asserts of the "canonical books of the Old and New Testaments," "This Scripture we believe and confess to be the *oracle of the Holy Ghost*, so confirmed by heavenly testimonies that if an angel from heaven preach any other thing let him be accursed" (Chap. 30).

The Anglican Reformers.

Although strictly speaking John Wycliffe is not a "Reformer," yet his teaching in so many points anticipated, even if it did not influence, that of the Reformers, both Anglican and foreign, that a short examination of his views on Holy Scripture does not seem out of place in this investigation. We have abundant evidence to prove that Wycliffe possessed a full belief in the divine inspiration and infallibility of the Bible. He calls Holy Scripture "the will and testament of God the Father" and "the charter written by God." To him also the Bible "is as a matter of fact the Word of God." "God," he declares, "has spoken through the prophets and Apostles as through authentic notaries. Therefore Scripture grounds its authority and absolute truth

above all the writings of men."[1] Such a statement can mean nothing less than a belief in the absolute verbal dictation of Scripture. At other times Wycliffe describes Christ as the author of the Scriptures, and it is remarkable that he largely anticipates Luther's view in centering all the Scriptures in the Gospel of Christ. "Christ Himself," he declares, "is the Scripture which it behoves us to know," and he adds that "to be ignorant of the Scriptures is to be ignorant of Christ."[2] "All authority of the Bible," Wycliffe asserts, "rests in the Gospel of Christ the Redeemer, all must be brought into union with Him. Christ the God-man and Saviour is the ground-thought and the goal of the Gospel."[3] Again his views closely resemble Luther's when he says "The Bible has authority and respect not for itself alone, but because Christ as Redeemer of mankind is the mind, the centre and the goal of the whole Scripture."[4]

But turning to the Reformation period itself. As we have observed, our Anglican formularies, while implying the full inspiration of Scripture, lay down no precise theory on the subject. It is sometimes contended that the question asked of the deacon in the Ordinal predicates a very rigid theory of divine Inspiration. "Do you unfeignedly believe all the Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament?" But this seems a very forced interpretation to place on a very indefinitely worded question, which, whatever may have been its implied intention, does not even refer to the Scriptures as a revelation of God. The addition which it is now proposed to make in the "Deposited Book"—"as given of God to convey to us in many parts and in divers manners the revelation of Himself which is fulfilled in Our Lord Jesus Christ," does not therefore necessarily weaken the original statement, and is moreover based on the very language of Scripture itself (Hebrews i. 1).

The Homily on "Holy Scripture" also only speaks in a very general and inconclusive way concerning its inspiration, when it says "Unto a Christian man there can be nothing either more necessary or profitable than the knowledge of Holy Scripture, forasmuch as in it is contained God's true word setting forth His glory and man's duty."[5] This general statement might seem to distinguish between Scripture and the Word of God, but it does not necessarily mean that the Bible is *not* the Word of God. It rather implies by "in it is

[1] "De veritate Sacræ Scripturæ," Vol. i. p. xxxii. Ed. R. Buddensieg, Leipzig 1904.
[2] Quoted Workman "John Wyclif" ii. 151.
[3] "De Veritate" i. p. xxxiii.
[4] Ibid. i. p. xxxv.
[5] "Homilies" p. 1.

contained, etc." that God's "true word" or message to us how to live to His glory is therein clearly set forth. That this is the evident meaning is clear from the statement which follows, that "in holy Scripture is fully contained what we ought to do, and what to eschew, what to believe and what to love and what to look for at God's hand at length" (p. 2). It is clear that the writer is not intending to make any subtle modern distinction between the Bible "not being the Word of God and yet containing the Word of God," since he goes on to say that "the words of Scripture be called the words of everlasting life" (p. 3) and he uses the terms 'God's Word' and the 'Scripture' quite interchangeably.

This conclusion is confirmed when we turn to the statements of the prominent Anglican Reformers themselves, since we find that their assertions of the inspiration of Holy Scripture do not lie open to the charge of looseness or indefiniteness. Cranmer evidently regarded the Scriptures as the Word of God and as verbally inspired. "If thou be desirous to know," he says, "whether thou be in the right faith or no, seek it not at man's mouth . . . *but at God's own mouth*, which is His holy Word written, which can neither lie, deceive nor be deceived." "Cleave ye fast to the sound and certain doctrine of God's infallible word, written in the canonical books of the New and Old Testament, which is able sufficiently to instruct you to eternal salvation."[1]

"The most sure and plain way of settling doctrinal contentions, is," Cranmer declares, "to cleave unto holy Scripture wherein whatsoever is found must be taken for a most sure ground and infallible truth."[2]

Bishop Ridley scarcely alludes to this subject, but in his Disputation against Transubstantiation in 1549, he urges as the principal ground—"the authority, majesty and verity of Holy Scripture," and he tells Secretary Bourn that since all the Evangelists "spake inspired by the Holy Ghost" that which "any of them spake was as true as that which was spoken of all." On another occasion he declares "what can crafty invention, subtilty in sophisms, eloquence or fineness of wit, prevail against the *unfallible* word of God?"[3]

Dr. Whitaker, the Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, in Elizabeth's reign, in his "Disputation" on the Scripture, deals largely with this question, and certainly advances the theory of the mechanical verbal dictation of Scripture. He says the Apostles and Evangelists "were

[1] "Remains" 13 and 19.
[2] "Lord's Supper," 23/4.
[3] "Works," 171, 157 and 16.

induced and moved to write by the special authority of Christ and the Holy Spirit, for the Scripture is called θεόπνευστος that is delivered by the impulse and suggestion of the Holy Spirit." And he adds that 2 Peter i. 21 " makes it plain that they followed the impulse and authority of the Holy Spirit, not their own will and choice. The men were merely *the instruments ;* it was the Holy Ghost who dictated to them."[1] While he admits the human mediation of the message, he insists clearly on its mechanical character. " We confess that God hath not spoken by Himself but by others. Yet this does not diminish the authority of Scripture. For God inspired the prophets with what they said, and made use of their mouths, tongues and hands ; the Scripture therefore is even immediately the voice of God. The prophets and apostles were only the organs of God."[2]

Whitaker would not hear of any discrepancies in different accounts. " The sacred authors," he declared, " committed all to writing with the exactest fidelity " since they were " admitted to the counsels of God." He therefore adversely criticises Erasmus for declaring that a slip of memory on the part of the Evangelist would not invalidate the authority of the whole of Scripture. " No one may say," he replies, " that any infirmity could befall the Holy Ghost, it follows that the sacred writers could not be deceived or err *in any respect.*" " For the Holy Spirit dictated to them whatever they wrote. . . Therefore we must maintain intact the authority of Scripture in such a sense as not to allow that anything is therein delivered otherwise than the most perfect truth required."[3] It is not altogether easy to see how Whitaker could reconcile with such a rigid theory of mechanical verbal dictation his own clear admission that the different authors of Scripture " have each their own manner of expression " and their " various styles,"[4] since if they were merely " the instruments " mechanically recording the Holy Spirit's exact phraseology there would scarcely seem to be room for their own " manner of expression " or " various styles."

It is natural, however, that, like Cranmer, Whitaker makes no distinction between Scripture and the Word of God. " God Himself speaks in the Scripture and Scripture is on that account styled the Word of God."[5] In fact, there seems to be no trace of such a distinction amongst the Anglican, and scarcely any amongst the foreign Reformers, with the exception of Luther's peculiar definition, already

1 " Disputation " p. 526.
2 Ibid. 296.
3 Ibid. 37-8.
4 Ibid. 478.
5 Ibid. 445.

explained. It is therefore very difficult to find any justification for the very definite assertion made by Principal Lindsay that "The Reformers drew a distinction between the Word of God and the Scriptures which contain or present that word. This distinction was real . . . and important consequences were founded on it." ("Hist. of Reform'n" i. 462). Prebendary Becon asks "what is the Word of God?" and he gives the detailed and definite answer that "It is the decreed sentence, word and will of God expressed and left behind of the prophets and Apostles to us in the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments."[1] Archbishop Sandys says shortly "The foundation of our religion is the written Word, the Scriptures of God."[2] while Bishop Jewel categorically asserts "The Scriptures are the Word of God."[3]

Richard Hooker, Jewel's celebrated protégé, is equally clear in identifying the Word of God with Scripture and also in asserting its infallible truth and inspiration. "We are to know," he says, "that the Word of God is His heavenly truth touching matters of eternal life and uttered unto men; unto Prophets and Apostles by *immediate divine inspiration*, from them to us by their books and writings" E. P. Bk. v. ch. xxi. 2. (1850). Archbishop Sandys is also equally definite in his assertion of the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures, since he calls them "the undoubted records of the Holy Ghost."[4] There is also ample evidence that Jewel accepted the plenary and verbal inspiration of Scripture. "What may be said of them to make them of greater authority?" he asks, "than to say "the Lord hath spoken them." "It is the word of God. God openeth His mouth and speaketh to us to guide us into all truth."[5] He severely criticised those who ventured to argue that St. Paul had exaggerated in declaring that 2 Timothy iii. 16. was true of *all* Scripture, such as genealogies and pedigrees which seem to be "profitless and vain and idle." He maintained that it was all divinely sent for our spiritual profit. "If they show vain in thine eyes," he says, "yet hath not the Lord set them down in vain. The words of the Lord are pure words." "There is," he adds, "no sentence, no clause, no word, no syllable, no letter, but is written for thy instruction, there is not one jot but it is sealed and signed with the Blood of the Lamb. *Our* imaginations are idle, our thoughts are

1 "Godly Prayers" 603.
2 "Sermons" 12.
3 "Works" iv. 1163.
4 "Sermons" 12.
5 "Works" 1166.

vain. *There is no idleness*, there is no vanity, in the Word of God."[1]

The Anglican Reformers also fully accepted the canon of Scripture. Dr. Fulke told Gregory Martin "We neither doubt of the authority of any certain book of the holy Scriptures, neither call we any of them into question, but with due reverence acknowledge them all and every one to be of equal credit and authority, as being all inspired of God, given to the Church for the building up thereof in truth."[2] In answering Martin's charge that Luther called the Epistle of James an "epistle of Straw," Fulke argues that Luther may have held this opinion at first but that he retracted it later, and that he only so regarded it in comparison with the epistles of Peter and Paul and other books of the New Testament. But he urges that even supposing he did hold such a view this ought not to prejudice other Protestants who did not hold it.[3]

Cranmer's acceptance of the traditional canon of Scripture is most clear and unequivocal. "So likewise," he says, "we believe the holy canon of the Bible, because the primitive Church of the Apostles, and eldest writers, and next to their time, approved them in their register, that is in their writings, which partly saw them, and partly heard them of the Apostles. And more receive we not, because these old fathers of the first Church testify in their books that there were no more than these required to be believed as the Scripture of God. And yet were these writings no less true *afore* they were allowed by them, than since, Christ witnessing and saying 'I seek no witness of man.'"[4]

Whitaker also makes it clear that the English Reformers did not question the New Testament Canon of Scripture but accepted all the books enumerated by the Council of Trent. He knows that in this position they were not following Luther and some of the foreign Reformed divines, who like Oecolampadius, altogether rejected Hebrews and did not regard the Apocalypse, James, 2 Peter and 2 and 3 John as on a par with the rest of the New Testament canon.[5] And although he is quite aware that some of the early Fathers and Churches also removed these books from the Canon without incurring the imputation of heresy, yet he is clear that "we doubt not of the authority of any book of the New Testament, nor

1 "Works" iv. 1175.
2 "Works" i. 8-9.
3 Ibid. 15-18.
4 "Remains" p. 59.
5 Apparently Zwingli also held a similar view since in the Bible which he published in 1527 he places Hebrews, James, Jude and the Apocalypse at the end of the volume, separated by a space from the other books.

indeed of the author of any, save only of the Epistle to the Hebrews," which he declares may not be Pauline. " If," he says, " Luther or some of his followers have thought or written otherwise—they must answer for themselves, their opinions are no concern of ours, nor is it incumbent on us to defend them, since we are in this respect no followers of Luther, and submit to the direction of better reason."[1]

Comparing generally the attitude of the Anglican and foreign Reformers on the question of Inspiration, we may safely affirm that they both accepted the plenary Inspiration of Scripture, even though Luther was at times strangely inconsistent in his application of this theory. But while the foreign Reformers generally rejected the idea of its mechanical verbal dictation, there is good evidence to show that a theory not far removed from this found very general favour amongst their Anglican contemporaries.

[1] " Disputation " 105.

CHAPTER II.

Authority, Supremacy and Sufficiency.

The question of the Inspiration of Scripture is closely bound up with that of its authority, supremacy and sufficiency. If Scripture be fully inspired as God's special message and final revelation to us then it follows that its authority must be supreme and its message sufficient. The early Fathers bear abundant testimony to the complete authority and sufficiency of Scripture as the rule of Faith. To take two or three examples. Irenæus declares "we know the Scriptures are perfect as being spoken by the word of God and his Spirit."[1] "If anything remains," says Origen, "which Holy Scripture does not determine, no third Scripture ought to be received to authorise any knowledge" (Hom. V. in Levit.). Again, Chrysostom warns his readers to "look for no other teacher, thou hast the oracles of God, none teaches thee like these."[2]

It was the common battle ground of all the Reformers to reaffirm this early Catholic appeal to the supremacy of the Scriptures, and they were met by their Romish opponents, not with the denial of Scripture as the rule of Faith, but with the assertion that it was not the sole rule, and that it needed supplementing by the co-ordinate, and thus in effect, the superior authority of the unwritten Tradition of the Church. For not only did the Council of Trent clearly assert that "the truth of the Christian Revelation is contained in the Written Word and in the Unwritten Tradition . . . . relating as well to faith as to morals preserved by continuous succession in the Catholic Church,"[3] but the Creed of Pope Pius IV. maintained that the Church of Rome alone was the true judge of "the sense and interpretation of Holy Scripture."[4] This claim, of course, exalted the teaching of the Church as superior to that of Holy Scripture. It was against this claim that the Reformers asserted the sole supremacy and sufficiency of the Word of God. In the typical language of one of their Confessions they declared that "no word of God at the present day exists, or can be certainly ascertained concerning doctrines and precepts necessary for Salvation

1 Writings of Irenæus" Bk. ii. ch. 28. p. 220 (1868).
2 "Works" xi. p. 451. (1837). Hom. ix. in Ephes. and Coloss.
3 Sess. iv. Can. i. Conc. xiv. 746.
4 "Sylloge Confessionum" p. 4 (1827).

which is not written or based on the Scriptures, but has (as is alleged) been committed by unwritten tradition to the custody of the Church." The Anglican Article VI also expresses this truth in a positive way when it says that "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to Salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby; is not to be required of any man that *it* should be believed as an article of the faith."

The Anglican Reformers.

The Reformers, both Anglican and foreign, give a united witness to this position—Cranmer deals at length with it in his treatise on "Unwritten Verities." "The True Word of God is the very touchstone which must try all doctrine and learning, whatsoever it be." "For this is most true," he declares, "that no unwritten verity is or can be necessary for our salvation, for then should the sacred and Holy Scriptures, written by the Apostles in the Spirit of God, and sealed with their bloods, seem to be insufficient and not able to bring us into salvation." "If there were any other word of God," he adds, "besides the Scripture, we could never be certain of God's Word, the devil might bring in among us a new word, a new Doctrine, a new faith."[1]

Bishop Latimer also condemns the Papists, because "they ought to have the Scripture for the only rule of faith."[2] Again, Prebendary Becon emphasises the unique sufficiency of Scripture when he says that "Christ and Christ's truth is only learned of the Holy Scriptures. They that teach any other thing than the Scriptures, teach not Christ but human inventions. Neither ought anything as a necessary truth be admitted in the Church of Christ except it may be established by the Holy Scripture and pure Word of God."[3]

Similarly, Richard Hooker in dealing with "the sacred authority of Scripture," declares that "they which add traditions, as a part of supernatural necessary truth have not the truth, but are in error." And later on in speaking of the sufficiency of Scripture, he adds "Whatsoever to make up the doctrine of man's salvation is added, as in supply of the Scripture's unsufficiency, we reject it. Scripture purposing this *hath perfectly and fully done it.*" "The Scripture," he continues, "yea every sentence thereof, is perfect and wanteth nothing requisite unto that purpose for which God delivered the same."[4]

[1] "Remains" 10. 14. 52.
[2] Ridley's "Works," 113.
[3] "Early Writings" 87.
[4] "Eccles. Polity" Bk. i. xiv. 2 and Bk. ii. viii. 5.

Archbishop Whitgift declared that the reason why "we utterly condemn and reject transubstantiation, the sacrifice of the Mass and the authority of the Bishop of Rome, is because they are not expressly contained in the Word of God, nor may be manifestly gathered therefrom."[1]

Dr. Whitaker, in answering Bellarmine's contention, "that beside the written Word of God, we require also the unwritten Word of God, that is divine and apostolical traditions," says, "all things appertaining to faith and morals may be learned and derived from Scripture, so as that traditions are in no way requisite." "The Scriptures," he adds, "were delivered to us that we might possess a rule of faith. Consequently the Scripture is sufficient and therefore there is no need of unwritten traditions."[2]

Again we might add here that Wycliffe had anticipated this Reformed position on the Authority of the Scriptures. He had strongly insisted that this authority was supreme apart from the dogmas of the Church. It was this opinion which earned for him the title of "doctor Evangelicus." He certainly forestalled the later doctrinal Reformers in maintaining that the traditions of the Church must not be classed with the Word of God. That alone must determine the Faith of the Church. In fact, not only did he declare that "It is impossible that any part of Holy Scripture is erroneous," but he even went so far as to assert that "in Holy Scripture is *all* truth." "It is plain," he adds, "that every disputation, every signification of terms or knowledge of discourses which has not its origin in Holy Scripture is profane."[3] Furthermore, he refused the testimony of the Fathers unless it was in accord with Scripture. "Neither the testimony of Augustine nor Jerome nor any other Saint should be accepted, except in so far as it was based upon Scripture."[4]

The Foreign Reformers.

The Foreign Reformers were just as clear and definite in their pronouncements on this question. Luther very early defined his position in his "Address to the German Nobility." "In the Schools of divinity," he declared, "the Bible should be supreme and other works duly subordinated." "When the Pope acts against Scripture we are bound by Scripture to punish and compel him," was another daring statement which he made at this time. And in asserting the sufficiency of Scripture he declares "The Church is born by the Word

1 "Works" i. 180.
2 "Disputation" 515. 657.
3 "De Veritate Sacræ Scripturæ," i. 138.
4 Quoted Workman "John Wyclif" ii. 150.

of promise through faith and is nourished and preserved by the same word; that is she herself is established by the promises of God, not the promises of God by her. The Word of God is incomparably above the Church: What man begets his own parent?" And he pertinently asks "But if one cannot found his Creed on the Bible now, why did Augustine have the right to do it 1100 years ago?"[1] "Neither am I to be believed nor the Church, nor the Fathers, nor the Apostles, nor an Angel from heaven if we teach anything against the Word of God."[2] Luther also told Charles V. at the Diet of Worms, that Scripture was the only standard of authority which he could recognise, "I am bound by the texts of the Bible, my conscience is captive to the Word of God."

In the same strain he answered Henry VIII. in 1522, "Against all the acts and words of Angels, men and devils I set the Scriptures and the Gospel . . . Here I stand and here I defy them. The Word of God I count above all else and the Divine Majesty supports me, hence I should not turn a hair were a thousand Augustines against me, and am certain that the true Church adheres with me to God's Word."[3]

"The Word," as Dean Wace, summing up Luther's position, well puts it, "in its more general form, or as recorded in the Holy Scriptures, contains all truths alike of belief and of practice which are essential to salvation here and hereafter. The Word of God, in whatever form, whether a simple promise embodied in a Sacrament, or a series of revelations made by God's Spirit to the Soul of man as recorded in the Bible, is the grand reality which, in Luther's view, dwarfed all other realities on earth."[4]

Melancthon, with his gentler disposition, was equally clear, if not quite as trenchant as Luther, in his assertion of the supreme authority of Holy Scripture. In his reply to the "Interim" of 1548, after stating that "no creature possesses power or authority to change the Word of God," he declares "God has graciously explained His mind and will in His Scriptures. These we must hear and receive and not as in worldly kingdoms be made to submit to the expositions of some one man who is empowered to give them at his pleasure." "The true Church of God," he told one of his slanderers, "may be satisfactorily distinguished from others by its reception of the Scriptures."[5]

1 "Primary Works" 81. 85. 101. 391.
2 "Galatians" p. 47. ch. i. 11-12.
3 Hartman Grisar "Luther" iv. 391.
4 "Primary Works" 444.
5 F. A. Cox, "Life of Melancthon" 496 (1815).

Zwingli is equally definite in his position "To this treasure namely, the certainty of God's Word, must our hearts be guided . . . For we ought to take the Holy Scriptures as our guide and Master, if any one uses them aright he should be unharmed, even though our little doctors be ever so much displeased." And in opposing the idea that the voice of the Church can affect or add to their inherent divine inspiration, he says "It were impious if we said that that which God Himself directs has need of human sanction! . . . For how could it be that the divine should get its sanction from the human?"[1]

His celebrated successor Henry Bullinger, in discussing the relationship of the Creeds to Scripture, takes the same view of their dependence on Scripture, as that laid down in Article VIII—"that they ought thoroughly to be received and believed, for they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture." They added nothing new, he declares, to what the Churches of Christ had not already taken and believed out of Holy Scripture, "we attribute to those ancient Confessions, so much as is permitted by the canonical Scripture, which we confess to be the only rule how to judge, to speak and to do."[2] A similar statement is made in Article 2 of the "Reformed Confession of France," which in declaring that "all things ought to be examined and tried by the rule of Scripture," adds, "wherefore we do for this cause allow those three Creeds . . . because they be agreeable to the written Word of God."

The "Confession of Bohemia" 1573 (Chap. 1) argues in the same way regarding the teaching of the Fathers, "We likewise teach, that the writings of Holy Doctors, especially those that are ancient, are also to be esteemed for true and profitable: whereof there may be some use to instruct the people; yet only in those things wherein they agree with Holy Scripture, or are not contrary there-unto . . . and swerve not from the consent, judgment and decrees of the ancient Church, wherein she hath continued unspotted in the truth." Similarly the "Latter Confession of Helvetia" (1566) declares "We do not contemn the Holy treatises of the Fathers, agreeing with the Scriptures, but modestly discount where they set down things strange or altogether contrary to Scripture . . . Neither do we think that we do them any wrong in this matter, seeing that they all, with one consent, will not have their writings matched with the Canonical Scripture, but bid us allow of them so far as they either agree with them or disagree (Chap. 2).

[1] "Works," 205, 207, 250.
[2] Decades i. 13.

It is interesting to notice that Cranmer writes in a precisely similar sense in the "Reformatio Legum." "We suffer not ourselves in controversies about religion, or matters of faith, to be pressed with the bare testimonies of Fathers or Decrees of Councils, much less with received Customs, or with the multitude of men being of one judgment or with prescription of long time. Therefore in controversies of religion, or matters of faith, we cannot admit any other judge than God Himself, pronouncing by the Holy Scripture what is true, what is false, what is to be followed or what to be avoided, so we do not rest but in the judgments of spiritual men, drawn from the Word of God."

We get a clear indication of the views of the great Scotch Reformer, John Knox, from the Scotch Confession of Faith of 1560 which was the work of Knox and five other prominent Presbyterians. In the "Preface" of this Confession, the supreme authority of Holy Scripture is most clearly asserted and a definite challenge is given to any man to find "any article or sentence repugning God's Holy Word" to point it out, and the compilers promise either to satisfy him from Scripture or amend that "which he shall prove amiss."

Accordingly, the Article on "The Authority of the Scriptures" asserts plainly that "the Scriptures of God are sufficient to instruct and make the man of God perfect," and that their "authority is of God," and "depends neither on men nor angels" (Art. 19).

In considering the authority of General Councils, the same Confession declares "its willingness to reverence and embrace their decisions," so far as they "are given by the plain Word of God." But it adds that Councils cannot "forge new Articles of our belief, neither give the Word of God authority; much less make that to be His Word, or yet the true interpretation of it which was not before His holy will expressed in His Word" (Art. 20).

The "Confession of Wurtemburg" (1552) is equally clear on this point, and on the supremacy of Scripture in general. "Wherefore seeing that the doctrine of the Apostles and Prophets is confirmed of God, the sentence of no one man, nor of any assembly of men, is to be received simply without trial for the oracle of the Holy Ghost; but it is to be laid down to the rule of the Prophets and Apostles' doctrine, that that which agreeth therewith may be acknowledged and that which is contrary thereunto may be confuted."[1]

The Inner Witness to Scripture.

But although all the Reformers, both Anglican and foreign, testify so clearly and emphatically to the sufficiency and

[1] Chapter 34.

supremacy of Holy Scripture, the question arises, on what grounds they accepted the authority of Scripture as the Inspired Word of God?

It has been asserted in this connection that there is a marked difference between the position of the Anglican and foreign Reformers, so much so that it is urged that the former received Scripture as authoritative, simply on the traditional testimony of the Christian Church, whereas the latter only accepted it on account of the merely subjective judgment of individual believers to its divine power and inspiration. Thus Bishop Gibson, in commenting on Article VI., declares "The Church of England appeals to the historical evidence of reception by the visible Church . . . This method of determining the canonicity of the books is in complete accordance with the general appeal which the Church of England makes to antiquity. It stands in sharp contrast to the method adopted by most of the Protestant communities of the sixteenth century, who preferred to base their acceptance of the books of Scripture on the 'inner witness of the Spirit,' a witness which however comforting and assuring to the believer who is conscious of feeling it in himself is yet scarcely likely to convince any who still need convincing and which is practically useless as a test for deciding what books are to be accounted canonical."[1]

But, as we have just seen, the foreign Reformed Confessions definitely recognise the teaching of antiquity, both in the Catholic Creeds and the writings of the Fathers, and, as we shall see, the evidence does not justify this sharp contrast which Bishop Gibson asserts on the question of the canonicity of Scripture. He is confusing the acceptance of the traditional Canon of Scripture with the most conclusive proof of its Divine inspiration.

Similarly, a well known authority declares that "the theory of the Reformation as to the authority of Scripture is that it is based upon the concurrent witness of the Holy Spirit in the Written Word and in the believer's soul."[2] While there is certainly some truth in such a statement, a careful examination of the attitude of the Continental Reformers on this question will tend to modify its strict accuracy, if not to describe it as only a half truth. What all the Reformers were greatly concerned to refute was the suggestion, if not the claim, of their opponents, that the Church virtually *created* the authority of Scripture. They did not challenge the fact that the Christian Church had testified to the Inspiration of the Canonical books, since, as Rogers stated,

[1] "Thirty Nine Articles" i. 250-1.
[2] Beard "Hibbert Lectures," p. 123.

when commenting on Article VI "All the Reformed Churches in the world are of the same judgment with us"[1] in accepting the Canonical Scriptures. We should remember also as proof of this assertion that the very language of our Article VI that "of whose authority was there never any doubt in the Church" was drawn from a foreign Reformed source—the "Confession of Wurtemburg" (Chap. 30). Moreover, the foreign Reformed Churches as well as the Anglican Church, did accept this traditional canon of Scripture as "God's Word," but they were careful to assert that the Inspiration of Scripture stood on even higher ground than this. It might be profitable for the believer to turn with assurance to these sacred inspired writings, but the best and, indeed, the only really conclusive evidence to him of this inspiration was the fact that the Holy Spirit spoke with power in those Scriptures to his own soul witnessing infallibly to their divine origin. This was the ultimate and absolute confirmatory authority of the Scriptures to the believer, but he had previously accepted them as having the authority of inspired canonical writings for the Christian Church.

The Foreign Reformers.

If the "Confessions" of the Reformed Churches be examined this will be found to represent their general view. "We comprehend," says the "Confession of Belgia," "The Holy Scriptures in those two books of Old and New Testament, which are called the canonical books, about which there was never any ado." "These books alone do we receive as sacred and canonical, whereupon our faith may rest, be confirmed and established. Therefore without doubt we believe all those things which are contained in them. . ." Here is a clear assertion of the acceptance of Scripture on the traditional testimony of the Church, but the "Confession" immediately supplements this belief, by adding "and that not so much because the Church receiveth and alloweth them for canonical, as for that the Holy Ghost *beareth witness to our consciences* that they come from God: and most of all for that they also testify and justify by themselves this their own sacred authority and sanctity, seeing that even the blind may clearly behold, and as it were feel the fulfilling and accomplishment of all things which were foretold in these writings."[2] This clear statement rests the authority of the Bible on a strong, threefold strand of testimony. (1) That of the Universal Church to their divine origin as the Canon of Scripture. (2) The inner testimony of the Holy Spirit to our conscience of their divine

[1] "Articles," p. 80.
[2] "Confession of Belgia," Arts. 4 and 5.

power—" The law of the Lord is perfect converting the Soul." (3) The testimony of the Scriptures themselves to their own inherent inspiration, power and authority. They give "light and understanding unto the simple."

It is difficult to see that a truer basis could be found for the acceptance of the supreme authority of Scripture. For it is valueless to rely simply on historic testimony to the inspiration and authority of Scripture if the Spirit of God does not speak through these Scriptures to our own souls. This must be the final and conclusive proof of their divine origin and power. Moreover, the converting and transforming power of the Scriptures on the lives of others, especially in heathen lands, further justifies and confirms our belief in them as God-given oracles. As Prof. Sanday expressed it, the pragmatic test 'is of the very greatest importance.' Plain men and women will take their own short cut for determining whether or no the Bible is divine. Does it prove itself divine to me? Has it proved itself divine to others like me?"[1] And in dealing with this question of internal authority, he well says "The divine force behind it is one that can be felt and felt directly—without the aid of any external sanction—The action of the Church in the formation of the Canon is not indeed superfluous but, as compared with this direct witness, quite subordinate." "There is no true antithesis between the Church and the Bible. The Bible is really the voice of the Church in its first and greatest age."[2] This is only expressing in a few words the paramount importance of the "inner witness" to the authority of Scripture, which was so strongly insisted on by the Foreign Reformers, a truth moreover which was also shared by their Anglican brethren.

Luther, although often singularly inconsistent in the application of his theories, emphasised strongly the need of this confirmatory inner witness of the Spirit. "Each man must believe solely because it is the Word of God." Here he asserts his belief in the traditional Scriptures, but he immediately adds "and because he feels *within* that it is true, even though an angel from heaven and all the world should preach against it."[3]

In insisting thus on the need of this subjective evidence, Luther was stressing the necessity of real experimental spiritual religion as against an empty formal belief in the authority of the traditional Scriptures, "Hence," he says, "God must tell you within your heart, This is God's Word."

1 "Oracles of God," p. 42.
2 Inspiration, xi.
3 Grisar "Luther," iv., 391.

"When the heart can feel assured that God the Father Himself is speaking to us, then the Holy Ghost and light enters in, then man is enlightened and becomes a happy master, and is able to decide and judge of all doctrine, for he has the light and faith in the Divine Word, and feels certain within his breast that his doctrine is the very Word of God."[1]

The Schoolmen had treated the Bible mainly as a reference book for theological dogmas, but, as it has been well said, "the original and invaluable thing which Luther did was to reveal the Bible as a new Book—a book by which the living God speaks, in which the saving Christ is found, on which the soul may feed its spiritual life."[2]

Zwingli also expresses the great value of this inner enlightenment by the Spirit, when he says "he who is born of the Spirit is no longer solely dependent on a book."[3] Such a statement is liable to misconstruction, but since Zwingli strongly condemns Anabaptists' teaching, he is certainly not advocating their theory that the "immediate" inspiration of the Spirit made them independent of the "dead letter" of Scripture.

The Reformed "Confession of France" also acknowledges the testimony of the Church to the authority of the Bible, although it places an even higher value on the inner witness of the Spirit. "We acknowledge these books to be canonical i.e., we account them as the rule and square of our faith and that *not only* by the common consent of the Church, but also much more for the testimony and inward persuasion of the Holy Ghost by whose inspiration we are taught to discern them from the ecclesiastical books" (Article 2).

It is obvious therefore that the prominence which the foreign Reformers give to the concurrent inner witness of the Holy Spirit, is due to the assertion of their opponents that the authority of Scripture depended entirely on the Church. "We affirm," declares the "Confession of Scotland," "that such as allege the Scripture to have no other authority but that which it hath received from the Church are blasphemous against God."[4]

Calvin utters the same disclaimer, "The Church," he says, "is built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets; it is evident that if the foundation of the Church is the doctrine of the Prophets and Apostles, that doctrine must have been sure before the Church began to be built. If the Christian Church was originally founded on the writings

[1] On St. John's Gospel. Grisar, Vol. iv., 398.
[2] Carnegie Simpson "Church Principles," 117.
[3] Opp. ii. p. 250 (Ed. Schuler).
[4] Article 19.

of the Prophets and the preaching of the Apostles, the reception of their doctrine as true must have *preceded* the building of the Church—It is therefore an empty fiction to assert that the Church has the power of sitting in judgment on the Scriptures as if their certainty depended on her decision." And then he carefully compares the relative value of the authority of the Church and the inner witness in accepting Scripture. "Unless men possess the certainty—higher and stronger than human reason can give, it is vain to defend the authority of Scripture by arguments or to establish it by the approval of the Church. When once we have embraced it as we do no other book, with a reverence suited to its dignity, those considerations which were at first insufficient to convince our hearts, become *most suitable aids to our faith.*"[1]

Anglican Reformers.

The Anglican Reformers also combatted the theory that the authority of the Scriptures depended on the Church. Dr. Whitaker freely admits that the testimony of the Church to Scripture is most valuable, since "it is the witness and guardian of the sacred writings." "It is like a notary," but he carefully explains that by the Church, he means "the whole multitude of the faithful," the "cœtus fidelium" of Article XIX. "We do not deny," he says, "that it appertains to the Church to approve, acknowledge, receive, promulge, commend the Scriptures to all its members; and we say this testimony is true, and should be received by all." But he refuses to rely solely on this witness. "We say," he adds, "there is a more certain and illustrious testimony, whereby we are persuaded of the sacred character of these books, that is to say, the *internal testimony of the Holy Spirit* without which the commendation of the Church *would have with us no weight or moment.*"[2] But this is precisely the position taken by the foreign Reformers. "All Christ's sheep," continues Whitaker, "know His Voice, and are internally persuaded of the truth of Scripture." "And," he concludes, "The Scripture is Αυτόπιστος that is, hath all its authority and credit from itself, is to be acknowledged, not only because the Church hath so determined and commanded, but because it comes from God, and that we certainly know it comes from God, *not by the Church*, but by

[1] "Institutes" 27 and 29.

[2] Wycliffe, when challenged concerning the ground of the Inspiration and authority of Scripture, frequently declares that "it rests on its divine source on the internal testimony of the Spirit" ("De Veritate" i. p. xxxii.)

the Holy Ghost."[1] His Romish opponent, Stapleton, had argued from a statement of Augustine's, who asserted that the canonical authority of the Scriptures was "established in the time of the Apostles and hath been set in a lofty tribunal through the succession of Bishops and propagation of Churches demanding the obedience of the faithful," that the Scripture rested on the "approbation and authority of the Church, and it cannot be clear and certain as to what book is legitimate, what supposititious, unless the Church teach us." Whitaker answered that "if the Canon of Scripture were settled by the Apostles themselves it is not now in the power of the Church to add any book to this Canon, since the Apostles themselves marked out a definite number of books for this Canon. "The Apostles," he says, "were certain immediate organs chosen by God and designated for the special office of writing and publishing the sacred books." They consigned "the Canon of Scripture as the unerring organs of the Holy Ghost, fortified by divine authority and commended to the Faith of all." "This authority of theirs was of an extraordinary kind." "Therefore the Apostles consigned the Canon of Scripture not as men or ministers but as the representatives of God, the tongue of the Holy Ghost, and as it were a divine oracle."[1] While we are not concerned here to defend Whitaker's explanation of the origin of the Canon of Scripture, his argument at least proves that he did not accept it merely on the authority of the Church.

The "Westminster Confession of Faith" 1647 very carefully defines the exact function and value of the Church with regard to the authority of Scripture and the attesting value of the "inner witness," of the Spirit. It is most definite in stating that "The authority of the holy Scripture dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or Church but wholly upon God—the Author thereof, and therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God." Yet it admits at some length that "we may be moved and induced *by the testimony of the Church* to an high and reverent esteem of the holy Scripture and the heavenliness of the matter . . . the efficacy of the doctrine—the consent of all the parts—the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation—and the entire perfection thereof, *are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God*," but it immediately adds, "yet notwithstanding *our full assurance and persuasion* of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts."[2]

[1] "Disputation" 279-87, 310-312.

[2] Chs. i., iv. and v. Schaff "Creeds of Evangelical Churches" (602-3).

It would seem therefore from the foregoing evidence, which is by no means exhaustive, that Principal Lindsay was scarcely justified in stating, without any qualification, that the " Reformers and the Confessions of the Reformation do not recognise *any* infallibility or divine authority which is otherwise apprehended than by faith."[1] For it is fairly clear that the Reformers appeal to, and accept the divine authority and inspiration of the Scripture, in the first place because of the universal testimony to them in the Christian Church, and then afterwards or concurrently they appeal, in confirmation of this fact, to the inner witness of the Spirit in the heart of believers testifying to their divine origin.

Even though the foreign Reformers may seem to give more prominence to the subjective judgment of individual believers and to the confirmatory testimony of the Spirit's witness to them concerning the inspiration and authority of the Word of God, there is practically little or no difference in their attitude from that of the Anglican. Both would certainly agree that the greatest proof of the divine authority of the Scriptures lies in the fact that the Holy Spirit through them has spoken to our hearts. Both also appeal to antiquity, and the unanimous teaching of the Catholic Fathers, in their witness to the traditional Canon of Holy Scripture.

[1] Hist. of Reformation i. 464.

CHAPTER III.

Interpretation.

It remains now to consider the Reformers' principles and attitude concerning the interpretation of Holy Scripture. And it is here probably that their departure from mediæval views and systems was the greatest, both as regards the method of interpretation and the competent authority to interpret. The subtle, philosophical treatment of the text of Holy Scripture by the Mediæval Schoolmen had rendered its plain meaning quite unintelligible to the ordinary layman. In fact, the layman even if he possessed a copy of the Bible, a rare occurrence indeed in the Middle Ages, was not supposed to be competent to interpret it. For Christian Truth was not limited to Holy Scripture, but to tradition as well, and the Church, which in practice meant the Pope, was regarded as the only infallible interpreter. Cardinal Bellarmine, although he lived in the Reformation era, well expressed this mediæval theory when he said "It is plain that Scripture is not *judex controversiarum* because it admits of various senses, nor can Scripture itself declare which is the true one. Besides in every well-ordered State, the law and the Judge are distinct. The law prescribes what is done and the Judge interprets the law, and decides accordingly. The question is about the interpretation of Scripture, but it cannot interpret itself." Accordingly the Church speaking through its alleged earthly head is exalted as the only true interpreter of Scripture. "We say," he asserts, "that the Church is the judge of the true sense of Scripture and of all controversies, that is the Pope with the Council in which all Catholics are assembled."[1] All the Reformers opposed this theory with the statement of the perspicuity of Scripture and its easy interpretation at least in all things necessary to salvation, to faith, and to morals.

Its Method.

In regard to the method of Biblical exegesis, the mediæval Schoolmen never attempted to discover the real sense of Scripture. It has been well said that "Scholasticism treats the letter of Scripture even in its plainest histories, as

[1] De Verb. Dei lib. iii. c. 9 and c. 3.

an enigma, which veils the latest after thoughts of theology. It destroys the real meaning of the Old Testament in the attempt to make it speak the language of Church tradition."[1] Nicolas of Lyra (d. 1340) was the only Schoolman who claimed that the literal sense of Scripture should be employed to establish Christian doctrines, but the usual mediæval interpretation treated Scripture in a fourfold sense—literal—allegorical—tropological—and anagogical. The literal preserved the record of facts, the allegorical teaches us what to believe, the tropological tells us what we are to do, while the anagogical gives us what we are to hope. Such a sense was fatal to all true interpretation and led to all sorts of puerile fancies, idle speculations, hair splittings and useless questions, such as the number of angels which could dance on a pin's point; or the revolting problem whether a host continued to be the Body of Christ if it was devoured by a mouse. Terribly un-Christian acts and entirely unscriptural dogmas were given a colour of support from absurdly distorted allegorical methods, such as the justification of the horrors of the Inquisition from the statement of the parable "they gather them in bundles to burn them," or the truth of the "Immaculate Conception of the Virgin" from the root of the tree in the Vision of Daniel.

The "Oxford Reformers" were the first to challenge this accepted method of obscuring Biblical Truth. Erasmus urged the necessity of a careful unconventional interpretation of Scripture which should have regard to its context, and leave the subtle explanations of the Schoolmen and go directly to the Sacred writings themselves. He claimed that the Scripture was easy of interpretation to the sincere disciple of Truth. Anxious, preparatory learning was not needful for a Christian. "All he had to do was to bring a pious and open heart, imbued above all things with a simple faith." "Only be teachable," he urged, "and you have already made much way in Christ's philosophy." "Other philosophies, by the very difficulty of their precepts, are removed out of the range of most minds—no age, no sex, no condition of life is excluded from this. The sun itself is not more common and open to all than the teaching of Christ."[2] These sacred books, he declared, "present us with a living image of His most holy mind," and "I should prefer to hear young maidens talking about Christ than some who in the opinion of the vulgar are consummate rabbis."

And Erasmus did not a little to achieve this preference, by giving the world his Greek and Latin version of the New

[1] Farrar "Bampton Lecture" 267.
[2] "Paraclesis" to New Test. Seebohm "Oxford Reformers" 203.

Testament, the study of which fired William Tyndale to translate the Scriptures into English, so that even the boy who drove the plough might read and study the Word of God for himself. Erasmus' New Testament, it has been well said, "formed a great epoch in the History of Western Christendom and was a gift of incalculable value to the Church."[1]

Colet, the friend and contemporary of Erasmus, to a large extent shared his aims and methods. Practically, if not theoretically, he abandoned the fourfold sense of Scripture and tried to get at the direct practical meaning and application of the passage. He affirmed that the New Testament "for the most part has the sense which appears on the surface, nor is one thing said and another meant but the very thing is meant which is said and the sense is wholly literal."

Colet certainly anticipated methods of interpretation which are now very familiar. He revived the views of Origen in dealing with the account of creation, since he considered that Moses figuratively accommodated his story to the limited Childlike intelligence and comprehension of the Israelites to whom he was writing, so that the account was not to be all taken strictly as literally accurate. He thought that a certain number of days were mentioned in order to inculcate the lesson of working six days and devoting the seventh to rest and worship. "Moses," he says, "never would have put forward a number of days for any other purpose than that, by this most useful and most wise poetic figment, the people might be provoked to imitation by an example set before them, and so ending their daily labours on the sixth day spend the seventh day in the highest contemplation of God."[2]

Erasmus claimed in relation to Biblical exegesis, and certainly with truth, that he, and the orthodox disciples of the New Learning who followed him, had "swept away the impediments and opened a field wherein they who may hereafter wish to explain the secrets of Scripture, may either play together with greater freedom, or join battle with more convenience." Certainly the doctrinal Reformers followed these Scholars in abandoning scholastic interpretations and the fourfold sense of Scripture.

Luther.

Luther, answering Erasmus, claimed that the "Holy Ghost is the simplest writer and speaker that is in heaven or on earth, therefore His words have no more than the simplest

[1] Westcott, "Hist. of Eng. Bible" 26.
[2] Seebohm u.s. 30-2.

sense, which we call the Scriptural or literal meaning."[1] Luther also based his interpretation on the final authority and sufficiency of Holy Scripture, and he condemned the use of allegory, although it might possibly be urged that his own method of interpreting the Scriptural incidents and narratives everywhere of Christ, fell but little short of this. He was however most emphatic in his condemnation of this method. "An interpreter," he declared, "must as much as possible avoid allegory that he may not wander in idle dreams," and employing the coarse unvarnished language of his day, he even graphically denounced it as a sort of beautiful harlot, who proves herself specially seductive to the idle man—And in emphasising this opinion "I have observed," he adds, "this, that all heresies and errors have originated, not from the simple words of Scripture, as is so universally asserted, but from neglecting the simple words of Scripture and from the affectation of purely subjective tropes and inferences." "Each passage has one clear definite and true sense of its own, all others are but doubtful and uncertain opinions."[2]

In his "Table Talk" (ch. i.) he declared that "the best art was to render Scripture in the simple sense." "I have grounded my preaching," he adds, "upon the literal word."

Bearing in mind the strong statements which Luther uses concerning the plenary inspiration of Scripture, amounting at times almost to an assertion of mechanical verbal dictation, it is rather startling to notice the three rules which he lays down for his method of translating the Bible. They certainly show a very free handling of Scripture. "The Bible," he says, "speaks and teaches of God's works, of this there is no doubt. But these works are divided with three classes, the house, the State and the Church. If a saying does not fit the Church, let us place it in whichever of the other classes it best suits. When there is doubt about the words or construction we must choose the sense—saving the grammar —which agrees with the New Testament. Then he boldly declares that "if a sentence is repugnant to the whole of Scripture we must *simply throw it away*, for the rabbis have corrupted the whole text with their notes trying to make it appear that the Messiah will come to give us meat and drink and afterwards will die." There is certainly therefore a measure of justification for the comment of one of his biographers that "Luther's attitude to the Bible contains one striking contradiction. He insisted that it should be taken as a whole and literally as God's inerrant word, and at the

[1] Works ed. Walch xviii. (1602).
[2] Farrar. u.s. 327.

same time he was freest of 'higher critics.'"[1] Moreover, we must admit that Luther's rule that all Scripture spoke of Christ was liable to abuse. In his Preface to the Old Testament 1523 he declares, "Here in the Old Testament shalt thou find the swaddling clothes and the manger in which Christ lies. Poor and of little value are the swaddling clothes, but dear is Christ the treasure that lies in them." But we can't thus *absolutely* interpret developed Christian doctrines, such as the Trinity and the Incarnation, from Jewish narratives, however helpful devotionally such a system of interpretation may be. But Luther seems to have grasped the idea of progressive revelation, for in repelling Munzer who defended the cruelties of his followers from such Old Testament precedents as Genesis xi. 2 and Deut. vii. 12 and xii. 2-3, he declares that " a certain divine command then existed for such acts of destruction which is not given to us at the present day."

Calvin.

Calvin, on the other hand, makes no distinction between the dispensations or between the different moral standards and perceptions of parts of the Old Testament and the New. He had, in fact, no notion of progressive revelation. Thus the severe vindictive acts and judgments of the Old Testament were applied indiscriminately to the present New Testament dispensation in a way which accounts for his persecution of Servetus, and also for the intolerant views of his Presbyterian followers like Thomas Cartwright, and even of Separatists like the Pilgrim Fathers in their treatment of Quakers and others. But Calvin was one of the foremost of Scripture commentators and he commented in a very clear and deep sense on almost all the Bible—He himself in commenting on Joel iii. 1 claimed " We may most truly declare that we have brought more light to bear on the understanding of Scripture than all Authors who have sprung up amongst Christians since the rise of the Papacy, nor do they themselves venture to rob us of this praise." In his Preface to the Epistle to the Romans he asserts that " the principal point of an interpreter consists in plain briefness " (p. xviii.). " Verily," he adds, " the word of God ought to be of such reverence with us, that through the diversity of interpretations it might not be drawn asunder of us, no not one hair breadth . . . he is not to be suffered which doth unreverently handle that thing, which of all other things that are in the earth, is most holy."[2] Differing from Luther,

[1] Preserved Smith, u.s. 267.
[2] " Romans," Preface xxi. (1844).

Calvin refused to base Christian doctrines on symbolical or ambiguous passages in the Old Testament, so as to read the Incarnation into the passage of the "Burning Bush" or the doctrine of the Trinity in the visit of the three Angels to Abraham. He regarded the Messianic prophecies as primarily applicable to the events and circumstances of their own times, although he admits their wider reference and fulfilment.

Bullinger.

Bullinger, the great Swiss Reformer, in dealing with the question of the interpretation of Scripture, declares that many things are so plainly set forth in it that they do not require any interpretation, and that other places may not be interpreted according to our fancies, but in accordance with the rest of Scripture. Here he was following the position laid down in Article XX. with regard to the Church that it may not "so expound one place of Scripture that it be repugnant to another." And Bullinger adds that Scripture is certainly not to be expounded "against the received Articles of our Faith contained in the Apostles Creed and other Confessions of ancient Fathers."[1] On similar lines the "Latter Confession of Helvetia" (1566) after quoting 2 Peter i. 20, "The Holy Scriptures are not of any private interpretation," adds, "therefore we do not allow all expositions, whereupon we do not acknowledge that which they call the meaning of the Church of Rome for the true and natural interpretation of the Scriptures," "we acknowledge that interpretation of Scriptures for authentical and proper, which being taken from the Scriptures themselves . . . accordeth with the rule of faith and love and maketh notably for God's Glory and man's Salvation" (Chapter 2).

Anglican Reformers.

Cranmer, as we have seen, is most definite in asserting the sufficiency of Scripture. "The Church," he insisted, "hath no further power over the holy Scripture, which containeth the Will and Testament of God, but only to keep it and to see it observed and kept." "For if the Church proceed further to make any new Articles of faith beside the Scripture or contrary to the Scripture . . . then it is not the pillar of the truth, nor the Church of Christ, but the synagogue of Satan and the Temple of anti-Christ."[2] Yet he admitted that in interpreting Scripture regard must be paid to what is truly Catholic teaching (quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus creditum est).

"I also grant," he says, in his treatise against "Unwritten Verities," "that every exposition of Scripture, wheresoever

[1] "Decades" i. 75-6.
[2] "Lord's Supper," 377.

the old, holy and true Church did agree is necessary to be believed." He is, however, careful to point out that any or all such explanatory teaching has one guiding limitation, that it must be in accord with Holy Scripture. "I forbid no man as though they should not ask and learn of the learned, for that is good and necessary . . . and yet, believe them no further than they can show their doctrine and exhortation to be agreeable with the true word of God written."[1]

It is interesting to notice that in this contention Cranmer had been forestalled by Wycliffe. He, too, had rejected the voice of the Church as the authorised interpreter of Scripture, while he also placed great weight on the subordinate authority of the unanimous teaching of the Fathers. But like the Reformers he urged strongly the perspicuity of Scripture. "The New Testament," he declared, "is of full authority and open to the understanding of simple men, as to points that be most needful to salvation"; and he adds that "the Holy Ghost teaches us the meaning of Scripture as Christ opened its sense to His Apostles."[2]

Although concurring in the fourfold sense of Scripture as employed by the mediæval Schoolmen, Wycliffe urges that the literal sense is the best. It is the basis "of all thorough and deep understanding of the Scriptures."[3] "Without the literal sense of Scripture," he declares, "truth is not valid." Wycliffe held that the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit was indispensable to the knowledge of the Scriptures and that therefore those who have not first been enlightened by Christ cannot properly understand them. But in order to be enlightened by the Spirit through the Scriptures it was essential that all should have a knowledge of them. Therefore Wycliffe asserts that "every Christian has the right and the duty to study the Bible; for not to know the Bible means not to know Christ, who Himself is the writing which we study and the belief which we must believe."[4]

It was this strong conviction of the necessity of a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures which forced Wycliffe, as it did Luther a century and a half later, to see the urgent necessity of a translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular, so that the common people could read and discover for themselves God's will and salvation. We should remember that it was a revolutionary theory for Wycliffe's day to declare that the

[1] "Remains," p. 59 and 14.
[2] Quoted "Workman u.s." ii. 51.
[3] Cf. Lechler "J Wycliffe" 270.
[4] "De Veritate" i. p. xxxvii. and xxxviii.

Bible should be accessible to all, but Wycliffe boldly asserted that "all Christ's people have a right that God's true Word should be taught unmixed, truly and clearly in our Mother tongue."[1]

The English Reformers generally, in common with the Continental, rejected the four-fold sense of Scripture. "Thou shalt understand," says Tyndale, in dealing with the question in his "Obedience of a Christian Man," "that the Scripture hath but one sense, which is the literal sense. And that literal sense is the root and ground of all, and the anchor that never faileth, whereunto if thou cleave, thou canst never err or go out of the way. The Scripture useth proverbs, similitudes, allegories . . . but that which the proverb, similitude or allegory signifieth is ever the literal sense which thou must seek out diligently." And then he goes on to explain the legitimate and limited use of allegories. "We may," he says, "borrow similitudes or allegories from the Scriptures and apply them to our purposes, which allegories are no sense of the Scripture, but free things besides the Scripture, and altogether in the liberty of the Spirit. Which allegories I may not make at all the wild adventures; but must keep within the compass of the faith and ever apply mine allegory to Christ and unto the faith." "But," he adds, "such allegory proveth nothing, neither can do. For it is not the Scripture, but an ensample or a similitude borrowed of the Scriptures . . . the literal sense proves the allegory and bears it as the foundation beareth the house, and because that allegories prove nothing, therefore are they to be used soberly and seldom, and only where the text offereth thee an allegory . . . God is a Spirit, and all His Words are spiritual. His literal sense is spiritual and all His Words are Spiritual."[2]

Dr. Whitaker, while conceding a use of allegory and figure in Scripture, asserts "that there is but one true, proper and genuine sense of Scripture arising from the words rightly understood, which we call literal." But he allows that "this may be variously accommodated and various things may be collected from it," and he illustrates this "accommodation" from Genesis iii. 15, where he says "the literal sense of these words 'The seed of the woman shall crush the Serpent's head,' is this, that Christ shall beat down Satan and break and crush all his force and power, although the devil is neither a serpent nor hath a head."[3] He admits the necessity of wise guides in interpreting the

[1] Ibid. i. p. xxx.
[2] "Doctrinal Treatises," 304-9.
[3] Disputation, 404-5. 364.

difficult passages of Scripture. "We concede," he says, "that there are many obscure places and that the Scriptures need explication, and that on this account God's ministers are to be listened to when they expound the word of God, the men best skilled in Scripture are to be consulted."[1] Dr. Fulke, the Master of Pembroke College, Cambridge, asserts that the difficult passages of Scripture should be explained by the clear ones. In a vigorous "Defence of the Translations of the Bible" against the attack of Gregory Martin, the seminary priest, he says "We expound not the Scriptures after our own private conceit and fantasy but as near as God giveth us grace, according to the plain and natural sense of the same, agreeable unto the rule or proportion of faith . . . Out of Scriptures themselves seek we the exposition of such obscure passages as we find in them."[2]

This claim that Scripture should be interpreted by Scripture, was the conspicuous rule of the Reformers.

Melancthon in his *Loci Communes Theologici*, which Luther eulogised as "the best book next to the Holy Scriptures," in dealing with the "Cause and Consequences of Sin" (Chap. x.), maintained that apparently contradictory isolated expressions must be interpreted in the light of the general teaching of Scripture on the subject. Thus the record "I will harden Pharaoh's heart" is "a mere Hebrew idiom signifying the permission and not the effectual operation and impulse of the divine mind," and "it does not correct the general statements of Scripture that the devil is the originator of evil." Again, Luther in his "Assertio" against the Bull of excommunication, had declared "I will not expound the Scripture by my own spirit, or by the spirit of any man, but will interpret it merely by itself and according to its own spirit." It was, as we have seen, asserted by the "Latter Confession of Helvetia" and even more definitely in the "Former Confession" of 1536, which laid down clearly the rule that Scripture is its own authentic interpreter. "The interpretation of Scripture is to be taken from herself, that herself may be the interpreter of herself, the rule of Charity and faith being her guide.[3]

Whitaker is equally insistent on this method. "The Scripture," he declares, "hath the clearest light in itself. There is the greatest perspicuity and light in the Scriptures, therefore the Scripture may be understood by the Scripture, if only one have eyes to perceive the light." "There is no

[1] Disputation, 404-5, 364.
[2] "Defence of Translations," p. 9.
[3] Article 2.

need that another should teach that this is the voice of somebody when I recognise it myself." "Neither should we seek the sense of Scripture from any other source than from the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture. For the sense of Scripture is Scripture itself."[1]

Such a claim is surely only reasonable on the theory of the unique and plenary inspiration of Scripture. No other interpreter or writer is similarly divinely equipped for the task of expounding an inspired canonical book, however helpful some other uninspired expositions may be. Moreover, the interpretation and comparison of Scripture by Scripture, considering the real unity of authorship of God's Word, should produce that required proportion or analogy of faith which is so necessary in the explanation of obscure or doubtful passages.

We should not forget that the Anglican Reformers clearly emphasised this point. For in asserting that "the Church hath authority in Controversies of Faith," provided it does not "ordain anything that is contrary to God's Word written," they were careful to insist that its teaching must be subordinated to this rule of Scripture being its own best commentator. So they add "Neither may it so expound one place of Scripture that it be repugnant to another" (Article XX).

John Wycliffe had also clearly pointed out that "the means by which one arrives at the right understanding of Scripture, are the critical sifting of the text, confidence in the guidance to the understanding of the Bible, *thorough comparing of one part with another*, the piety of the mind of the searcher and the inward enlightenment of the Spirit"[2]

In conformity with this rule we find the "Westminster Confession of Faith" 1647, clearly stating that "the infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.[3]

The Authority to Interpret.

But even if the correct method of interpreting Scripture is by Scripture itself, this inevitably leads to the further crucial question, who has the right or authority to make such comparison? Who, from a practical point of

[1] "Disputation" p. 289-90. 447.
[2] "De Veritate" i. p. xxix.
[3] Ch. i. 9. Schaff "Creeds of Evan. Churches," p. 605.

view may interpret Scripture? The Mediæval theologians, as we have seen, depended on the Church's interpretation of the Bible, which practically consisted in the opinions of the Schoolmen confirmed by the decisions of Councils or Popes. In this way the Church was interposed between the believer and the Word of God, which could only be reached through the medium of the priest. The Reformers, who had experienced God's power speaking to them directly through the sacred Scriptures, naturally opposed this mediæval theory, since saving faith was to them simple trust in a loving Father's promises through the atoning work of Christ, and not a mere intellectual assent to certain ecclesiastical doctrines and moral rules. The Scriptures brought them into the blessed experience of covenant relationship with God. The Reformers' answer to this question of the authority to interpret Scripture, was therefore based on their own personal spiritual experience. Its expression might vary but its purport and effect was similar.

Luther with his strong insistence on the priesthood of all believers, was a firm believer in the right of private judgment. The Holy Spirit and the Word of God was for all, and therefore he held it to be the duty and privilege of every believer to test his faith by the Scriptures. "To ascertain and judge about doctrine," he declared, "pertains to all and every Christian in such a way that let him be anathema who injures their right by a single hair."[1]

Again, in arguing against the Roman theory, that no one may interpret the Scriptures except the Pope, Luther pertinently but sarcastically asks, "If they imagine the Holy Ghost never leaves them. . . where were the need and use of the Holy Scriptures? Let us burn them and content ourselves with the unlearned gentlemen of Rome in whom the Holy Spirit dwells."[2] "Our baptism," he adds, "has made us subject to God's Word alone, why then should we suffer a man (the Pope) to make us slaves of his words?"

Luther therefore held that faith was a necessary requisite, but that given this, anyone could interpret the Bible, "even the humble miller's maid; nay a child of nine, if it has faith"; and he further explains, building surely on his own severe spiritual struggles, that whoever seeks primarily and solely the teaching of God's Word; upon him the Spirit of God will come down and expel our spirit so that we shall arrive at the theological truth without fail." The Lutheran Confession of Wurtemburg (1552) exposes the theory that correct inter-

[1] Werke xxviii. 329. Erl Ed.
[2] "Primary Works" 169. 227.

pretation of Scripture is the monopoly of the Church through its hierarchy. "Many examples," it affirms, "also do witness that chief Bishops have been often foully deceived: wherefore the gift of expounding the Scripture is not so tied to the Popes, that whosoever shall be Pope must needs rightly expound Scripture; but the true meaning of the Scripture is to be sought in the Scripture itself and among those that being raised by the Spirit of God expound Scripture by Scripture" (Chap. 30).

Similarly, Zwingli asserts the necessity of faith. "It is not," he says, "the function of one or two to expound the words of Scripture, but of all who *believe in Christ*"[1] while the advice which Tyndale gives is practically identical, when he says "Forasmuch as the Scripture is nothing else but that which the Spirit of God hath spoken by the prophets and apostles, and cannot be understood but of the same Spirit; let every man pray to God to send him His Spirit to loose Him from his natural blindness and ignorance and to give him understanding and feeling of the things of God."[2] Latimer boldly asserts the right of the Spirit-taught and enlightened layman to interpret Scripture. "A layman," he declares, "fearing God is much more fit to understand Holy Scripture than any arrogant and proud priest, yea, than the bishop himself."[3]

Whitaker also claims that it is only the true believer who can properly understand Holy Scripture, although "All things necessary to salvation are plain in the Scriptures." Yet he maintains that "the Scriptures cannot be understood by all, and yet should be set before all. So Christ proposed His parables to all, though He only explained them to His disciples. For the true interpretation of Scripture is granted only to the elect and faithful."[4]

Holding these views on the interpretation of Scripture, the Anglican Reformers embodied them in their authorised confession of Faith in Articles VI. and XX. The latter Article gave a careful and limited function to the Church in interpreting Scripture in relation to "controversies of Faith," that "it must ordain nothing that is contrary to God's Word written," nor expound Scripture in contradictory senses, while Article VI. clearly asserts that "whatsoever is not read in nor proved by Scripture is not required of any man to be believed "as an article of the Faith." It was

1 "Works," 286.
2 "Doctrinal Treatises" i. 89.
3 "Ridley's Works" 114.
4 "Disputation" 614.

claimed by Newman in Tract xc. that these statements settle nothing as to "whether the Church judges Scripture at her *sole discretion* or on her sole *responsibility*, i.e., what the *media* are by which the Church interprets Scripture, whether by a direct divine gift or Catholic tradition, or critical exegesis of the text or in any other way, and next who is to decide whether it interprets Scripture rightly or not. In other words, not a word is said, on the one hand in *favour* of Scripture having no rule or method to fix interpretation by, or as it is commonly expressed being the sole rule of faith, nor on the other of the private judgment of *the individual* being the ultimate standard of interpretation."[1] But it is surely reasonable to conclude that the Statement "not required of *any man* to be believed" implies the exercise of the private judgment of the individual"? We should remember that the New Testament Epistles themselves were sent on the same presupposition of the ability of the men and women, mostly of humble origin and mediocre attainments, to understand them easily without any specially constituted interpreter. Surely therefore the "whatsoever is not *read therein*" of Article VI., naturally refers to the "any man" as to what *he* finds in Scripture. It is obvious that this was the construction which the Reformers intended to be placed on the language of the Article, since in their Homily on the Knowledge of Salvation, we are exhorted "to search diligently for the well of life in the books of the New and Old Testaments;" and we are told that even "the humble man may search any truth boldly in the Scripture without any danger of error. And if he be ignorant he ought the more to read and search Holy Scripture to bring him out of ignorance."[2] Nowhere, in fact, in the Anglican formularies are we told that the individual is to rely on the teaching of the Church or on Catholic tradition for the correct interpretation of God's Word. Not even the priest is directed to this source for his guidance, but instead he is asked at his ordination, "Are you determined to teach nothing as required of necessity to eternal salvation but that which *you* shall be persuaded may be concluded and proved by Scripture?" It should also be borne in mind that in taking up this position the Anglican Reformers were correctly restoring the rule of the early Catholic Church. The testimony of the Fathers is clear on this point. To take two typical examples, we find Chrysostom declaring unequivocally "The Holy Scripture interprets itself and does not suffer the hearer to err. . . . If

[1] "Tract xc." p. 8. (1865).
[2] "Homilies" p. 2. 6. (1844).

you will attend diligently to the reading of Scripture you shall need nothing else, since it is the true Word of Christ, 'Seek and ye shall find.'"[1]

"Those who will," Theophilus of Antioch tells the heathen Antolycus, "may by reading the things spoken by the prophets know accurately the truth, and not be led astray by vain fancies."[2] Similarly, Origen replying to Celsus, declares "Others who are willing to search the Scripture, and have understanding may find out its meaning;" although anticipating the position of the Reformers, he adds "it is only he who is truly wise in Christ who can unfold the whole order of things mysteriously spoken in the prophecies, comparing spiritual things with spiritual things, and confirming each of the things found from the phraseology customary in the Scriptures."[3] In view of such clear evidence there would seem very little justification for a recent categorical statement that "Catholicism has always held the Bible in the context of the Church and appealed to the tradition of the Church as older than the books which enshrine it."[4]

But while the Reformers in conformity with early Catholic usage insisted on the right of the spiritually enlightened believer to interpret the Scripture and test all doctrine by this standard, as we have seen, they by no means disregarded the accumulated historic teaching and wisdom of the Universal Church. They rightly gave deference and respect to the teaching of all such subordinate authorities and guides, but they insisted that these must have no binding authority over the consciences of believers. They did not wish to despise or reject lightly the teaching of the whole Catholic Church through its Œcumenical Councils, i.e., where it could be clearly ascertained, as in the case of the great Catholic Creeds or in the writings of the Early Fathers. But they insisted that all such standards must be subordinate to the sole rule of faith and Christian knowledge—the Word of God, and they emphasised this point clearly in their statements concerning the three Creeds and General Councils.[5] The ultimate authority must be that of the appeal to Scriptures by the individual spiritually enlightened conscience, but this should not contemptuously disregard the traditional teaching of the Universal Church. It should rather justly esteem and carefully weigh its doctrines and practices and accept them provided only it finds them in accordance with

1 "Works" ix. 468. (1837). In Epist. Rom. Homil. i. 425.
2 Ad Antol. lib. ii. § 35. p. 101. (1847).
3 "Works" ii. ch. xi. 434 (1872) Contra Celsum lib. vii. § 11.
4 Gore "Anglo Catholic Movement," p. 17.
5 Articles viii. and xxx.

Scripture. As Cranmer expressed it, "the authority of the Orthodox Fathers is by no means to be despised but that the Holy Scriptures ought to be interpreted by their decisions we do not allow. For the Holy Scripture ought to be to us both the rules and judges of all Christian doctrines." "The Fathers themselves," he adds, "frequently admonished their readers only to admit their interpretations as far as they found them agreeable to Scripture."[1]

[1] "Reformatio Legum" Tit. 1. c. 15.

CHAPTER IV.

Conclusion.

Summarising and gathering up the results of our investigation, what in brief were the views of the Reformers on Holy Scripture? There can be no question that all the Anglican and most of the foreign Reformers held at least a thorough belief in the plenary inspiration, unique authority and absolute trustworthiness of God's "living oracles." Several, especially the Anglicans, went further than this, and approached the view, commonly held by the mediæval Schoolmen, of the absolute mechanical verbal dictation of the Scriptures, although the vast majority admitted the individuality of the sacred writers. Even if some of the Continental Reformers, as we have seen, were rather free in their criticisms, especially of the canon of Holy Scripture, and were also, like Luther, at times inconsistent in the application of their declared views of Inspiration, we certainly have no record that they ever attempted, as so many modern critics do to-day, to eliminate the supernatural and miraculous elements in the Scriptures. We have seen also that their position concerning the inspiration and authority of Holy Writ was no novel one, since it was largely the reassertion of similar views held by the early Catholic Fathers, as well as being the generally accepted position of later Anglican ecclesiastical leaders till quite modern times. For as recently as 1863 we find the Archbishops and Bishops of the Church of England, in sending a united letter of Protest to Bishop Colenso, declaring "All our hopes for Eternity—the very foundation of our Faith—our nearest and dearest consolations are taken from us—if one line of that Sacred book be declared unfaithful and untrustworthy."

Again, with regard to the identification of Scripture with the Word of God, we find that the Reformed Episcopal Church of America in its Article V. of 1875 declares "Holy Scripture is therefore the Word of God; not only does it contain the Oracles of God, but it is itself the very oracles of God."

Moreover, there is very little evidence to show that the Reformers made any clear distinction between the Scriptures

and the Word of God. Luther, it is true, practically limited the "inner" Word of God to the Gospel message of Christ's salvation, but the Anglican Reformers, especially, use the terms synonymously,[1] while, as we have seen, the same usage is evident in the writings of Zwingli, Bullinger and Calvin. They recognise, of course, that the Scriptures contain the words of sinful and fallible men as well as the direct messages and words of God. But the Bible as a whole was to them the Word of God, and all Scripture was Θεόπνευστος. They accepted its integrity and appealed to its absolute authority, and experienced and proclaimed its power as "the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God" (Ephes. vi. 17). Our study of their writings would therefore lead us to state emphatically that the attitude of the Reformers towards the Word of God was no mere Bibliolatry, but a strong conviction that the eternal God spoke to them through the Scriptures concerning Himself and their salvation.

This conviction was born of their very real practical experience of the converting and transforming power of the Gospel message which it proclaimed, and which had brought to them, and through them to others, the manifestation of God Himself in the person of Christ. The Reformers themselves had proved the value and power of the Gospel manifest in the Scriptures. Luther realised fully the regenerating force of the knowledge of the Bible which he translated, and which had such a marvellous circulation amongst the German people during his lifetime.[2] Referring to his translation of the New Testament, he exclaimed "Would that every town had its interpreter, and that this book alone might be on the tongues and in the hands, the eyes, the ears, and the hearts of all men."

The Reformation—A Spiritual Revival.

It was because the Reformers appealed with such intense conviction to the Scriptures as fully inspired and trustworthy, that the Divine revelation of the Gospel message which they set forth led to such a wonderful revival of true religion which so changed the lives and characters of the

[1] Archbishop Parker refers to the "Bishops' Bible" as "this *high treasure of God's Holy Word.*" "Parker Corresp." 338.

[2] A celebrated Church historian speaking of the effect of Luther's Bible, declares that "the different parts of this translation being successively and gradually spread abroad among the people produced sudden and almost incredible effects, and extirpated root and branch the erroneous principles and superstitious doctrines of the Church of Rome from the minds of a prodigious number of persons." Mosheim "Eccles. Hist." iv. 60.

people of their day. At the dawn of the Reformation, ignorance, gross superstition and vice were widespread, so much so that even Cardinal Bellarmine acknowledged that " there was no strictness in spiritual Courts, no chastity in manners, no reverence in presence of what was sacred, in short almost no religion." But by the faithful preaching of the Gospel of God's grace, in a little over a generation, this was wonderfully changed. Clergy and people, who had before lived worldly, selfish, vicious and depraved lives, were now filled with the fear of God and with a sense of His pardoning mercy which transformed their characters and filled them with a burning zeal for the salvation of others. In England we are told that Latimer's preaching so convicted his hearers that they were moved to real repentance and " to detestation of sin and to all godliness and virtue,"[1] while the earnest preaching of God's Word by Dr. Rowland Taylor, so changed the town of Hadleigh, that " its labouring classes were diligent students of the Scriptures and for the most part followers of God's Word in their living."[2] It was through the wide dissemination and constant reading and preaching of the Scriptures that shortly afterwards or at least within the next century when the fruit of this Revival was fully reaped, Puritan England became a God-fearing people—" the people of a book and that book was the Bible." Such results certainly do not justify a recent statement that the Church of England took " an enormous risk " in " putting the Bible in the hands of the people."[3]

We may certainly say that the authority of the Bible stood higher in general estimation, and that its teaching and truths were more reverenced as God's voice speaking to man and revealing to him the way of peace and holiness at the time of the Reformation than they are to-day. It is therefore a reasonable inference, since men's spiritual needs are as real as ever and the Holy Spirit is still living and working in men's hearts, to forecast that a return to a convinced belief in the Bible as fully inspired and trustworthy would bring with it a similar much needed spiritual awakening.

[1] Becon's Works 425.

[2] Foxe. " Acts and Monuments" vi. 677. It is well to point out, in view of the irrelevant accusations which are sometimes levelled against the doctrinal Reformation, that it is no reflection on the earnest spiritual revival of Edward VIth's reign, that the religious changes then effected were exploited by a worldly and unscrupulous party of statesmen for their own sordid ends, at the expense usually of gross pillage and spoliation of Church property and of endowments designed for pious objects. A similar toll is usually levied in all times of upheaval and revolution.

[3] Bishop Frere of Truro. See " Reservation," 105.

Lesson from the Past.

But what is the special lesson which our study of this great subject in the writings and teachings of the Reformers leaves with us? Surely it is that the "Word of God is living and powerful" (Heb. iv. 12). While it may be hindered and hampered, it is not absolutely bound in its saving work by the faulty opinions and views of men as to its authority, inspiration or interpretation. It has been well said, that "never has there been a period in which the Bible, or such part of it as has been suffered to filter its way to the multitude between the enclosing nets of authority or through the choking sands of tradition, has not been a wellspring of salvation. Its most primary, its most essential truths, which are so few and simple that they might be written upon the palms of the hand, having always been sufficient for the saving of the soul."[1]

With the progress of knowledge and the advance of scientific investigation it is inevitable that each age must bring its slightly varying views of the Bible, so that Christian thinkers and believers will differ somewhat in their theories of its inspiration, in their methods of its interpretation, and also in their application of a reverent Biblical criticism. Each age also has always had, and will always have, its destructive rationalistic assaults on "God's living oracles," and although we may be inclined, and with good reason, to regard the attacks of present day "Modernists," as far more dangerous and harmful than those of the Reformation or any other period, yet we should remember that they are doomed to ultimate failure. In spite of the great prevalence of destructive Higher Critical theories which certainly go far to unsettle the faith and undermine the authority and integrity of God's Word, the records of the increasing sale of the sacred Scriptures furnish us with conspicuous proof of their inherent vitality and of their permanent and pre-eminent value. We have abundant evidence also, both at home and in the triumphs of the Cross in heathen lands, that the Word of God "liveth and abideth for ever." And "this is the Word which by the Gospel is preached unto us" (1 Peter i. 23-5).

Therefore even though some of our great Reformation leaders may seem to many to have upheld a theory of Inspiration unwarrantably slavish and mechanical, and again while others may appear to some to have used an unjustifiably free or irreverent method of criticising, accepting or rejecting certain portions of Holy Writ, yet as we have seen, it was

[1] Farrar. u.s. p. 15.

through the prayerful and diligent study of the Scriptures that they were all led to a simple faith in Christ as Saviour and Lord. And God, by His Spirit, so spoke to them through His inspired Word that their lives were transformed and they were enabled by preaching the same Gospel truths, which had been revealed to them in the Scriptures, to overthrow mediæval ignorance and superstition and error. So although we must deplore the fact that to-day there are so "many who adulterate the Word of God" (2 Cor. ii. 17) and seem "to handle it deceitfully" (2 Cor. iv. 2.), too often "making it of none effect" through their "traditions" or their destructive criticisms, let us take courage from the lessons of the past and believe that the Word of God is its own best defender and can never be vanquished. Many even who only read it to condemn or criticise, are in the end convinced and convicted by its truths, and receive it at length "not as the word of men" but "as it is in truth," the very "word of God which worketh effectually in all those who believe" (1 Thess. ii. 13). Nevertheless it would seem only a natural consequence that a weakening of a belief in its divine authority and inspiration must result, when the Bible is held up to us as containing "legend, myth, allegory and fable," and also "statements which we cannot regard as historically true."[1] For history and experience teach us that in proportion as belief in an Inspired Word loses its hold on men's minds, personal religion declines, and the Christian message degenerates into a mere attempt at moral reformation or into a gospel of social service or material betterment. We have indeed the frank admission of a competent authority that modern Biblical criticism is not without its real dangers in this direction, since he affirms that whenever it is employed "without loyalty to Christ it has shaken the belief of some in the fundamentals of religion, distracted others from the zealous service of God and benumbed the preaching of Christ's Gospel."[2] A striking confirmation of the evil effects of modern Biblical criticism was afforded the writer in a letter from a Professor at the Union Theological Seminary in New York, who after deploring the present "theological uncertainty," and explaining that the work of the Seminary was chiefly confined to the content of the Christian Faith, added, "At no time in my life have I known the outlook to be so disconcerting. The objectivity of God—the reality of the supernatural—the Divinity or Deity of Jesus—the reality of the Resurrection—all this is widely doubted, and men are agonised over their message."[3]

[1] Canon Storr in "Liberal Evangelicalism" p. 83.
[2] Sir G. A. Smith "Modern Criticism" 25.
[3] Letter. Feb. 1, 1927.

Yet in spite of all that is destructive, harmful and dangerous in the modern treatment of the Scriptures, their circulation shows no sign of abatement, and if they are only read earnestly and prayerfully with the sole desire of "being instructed in every good work and to increase in the love and service of God,"[1] they will to-day, as in the days of the Reformation, always prove their own living power to sanctify lives and beautify characters. Calvin's exhortation concerning the invincibility of God's Word is surely both prophetic and inspiring. "Let us not forget," he says, "that though Satan and the world have sought in marvellous ways to crush, to overturn or to obscure the Word of God, yet it has always come forth from the fight victorious and has remained unconquerable."[2] This is undoubtedly true, and is due to the fact that whatever may have been the false, mistaken or dangerous methods of exegesis the Bible is in itself a well-spring of salvation, and if given free course, is its own best interpreter, in that through its inherent divine inspiration, its life-giving message will ever reach men's hearts and consciences with convicting and converting power. The sincere knowledge of its truths will always make men "wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus." For as Richard Baxter finely said, "What book like the sacred Scriptures . . . which do bear the very image and superscription of God . . . has taught the world the knowledge of God, the creation of the world and the hope and felicity of man. What heavenly glory is, and how procured and how to be obtained and by whom! What book hath so taught men to live by faith and hopes of glory, above all the lusts of sense and flesh, and to refer all things in the world to spiritual, holy and heavenly ends, to love others as ourselves and do good to all?"[3] We can therefore rejoice that not only is "the Word of God living and active" (Heb. iv. 12. R.V.), but that it is also an exhaustless treasure house so that we may rest assured that to the earnest, reverent, spiritually enlightened student God "has still more light and truth to break forth from His Holy Word."

[1] Jeremy Taylor "Holy Living" ch. iv. sect. iv.
[2] "Institutes" 32.
[3] "The Catechizing of Families" reprinted in Wordsworth "Christian Institutes" I. 249 (1842).

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